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Crossing Boundaries: Exploring Black Middle And Upper Class Preservice Teachers' Perceptions Of Teaching And Learning In High Poverty Urban Schools

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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, CROSSING BOUNDARIES: EXPLORING BLACK MIDDLE AND UPPER CLASS PRESERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGH POVERTY URBAN SCHOOLS, by ANDREA D. LEWIS, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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ABSTRACT

CROSSING BOUNDARIES: EXPLORING BLACK MIDDLE AND UPPER CLASS PRESERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGH POVERTY URBAN SCHOOLS

by

Andrea D. Lewis

The intent of this study was to explore the perceptions of Black middle and upper class preservice teachers as they relate to teaching and learning in high poverty urban schools. Participants included 11 senior early childhood education preservice teachers at a historically Black college in the southeast region of the United States. The study was conducted using qualitative inquiry. Background questionnaires, individual interviews, and a group interview served as the data sources.

While there is an extensive body of knowledge focused on the increasing number of White preservice teachers who lack experience with students in diverse communities, there are limited studies pertaining to the perceptions of Black middle and upper class preservice teachers who may lack experience with students in high poverty urban schools. In the Black community, color and social class have been inexorably linked for generations. Social class is conceivably one of the most significant sources of inequality in schools and was one of the first factors, after intelligence, researched by scholars as a source of difference in achievement.

The study answered the following questions: (1) What are the perceptions of Black middle and upper class preservice teachers regarding teaching and learning in high poverty urban schools? (2) To what extent do Black middle and upper class preservice teachers believe they can be successful teachers in high poverty urban schools?

The data demonstrated that Black middle and upper class preservice teachers (a) prefer to teach in communities similar to their own school experiences; (b) believe students from high poverty urban schools can achieve at the same level as students in middle and upper class schools, but are uncertain of the value their informal knowledge brings to the classroom; (c) recognize effective teaching strategies and best practices in classroom instruction; and (d) have mixed feelings regarding their ability to connect with students and parents in high poverty urban schools. Implications from the study include expanding the scope of field experiences for Black middle and upper class preservice teachers in high poverty urban schools and recognizing Black middle and upper class preservice teachers in teacher education research.

CROSSING BOUNDARIES: EXPLORING BLACK MIDDLE AND UPPER CLASS PRESERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGH POVERTY URBAN SCHOOLS

by

Andrea D. Lewis

A Dissertation

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in
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in
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As my career has come full circle to teaching undergraduate preservice teachers with similar backgrounds to myself, I hope to instill in them a sense of passion and the ability to recognize the intrinsic will they should possess as future teachers. My arrival at

this point has not been the traditional journey of a college instructor, but one that has been cultivated by mentorships and happenstance. If I can provide my current students with the intrinsic will necessary to educate *all* students and provide them with a critical pedagogy and understanding of the interconnectedness of community and schooling, then I will have fulfilled my mission and journey that began with my inaugural class of first grade students.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Historically Black College and University (HBCU)

Kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12)

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The current demographics of teachers compared to the ever-changing composition of today's public schools demonstrate an increasing and immediate need for a paradigm shift in traditional teacher education programs. The research suggests that teachers cannot just be aware of changing demographics, but must be equipped with knowledge, skills, and dispositions to meet the needs of diverse learners (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Vaughan, 2005; Kea & Utley, 1998; Feng, 2005). The field of education must recognize and address the growing diversity in our nation.

Teachers are a school's most important resource, but the distribution of teachers is highly uneven in urban schools which have high concentrations of poor and minority students (Cannata, 2010). There is a comprehensive body of knowledge and literature focused on the increasing number of White preservice teachers who lack experience with students in diverse communities (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 1999; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Vaughan, 2005). However, there are limited studies focusing on Black middle and upper class preservice teachers who lack experience with students in high poverty urban schools. Class is often linked to ethnicity, race and gender (Cole & Omari, 2003; deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999; Kunjufu, 2002; Rist, 2000). It is one of the leading causes of school inequality (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999; Lareau, 1987). Given this knowledge, it is imperative to determine what competencies Black middle and upper class preservice teachers need to achieve success in high poverty urban schools.

In this dissertation, I provided a review of literature, explanation of my theoretical framework, details of the methodology of my study, and analysis of the data. In addition, I included a history of social class in schools, how teachers are traditionally prepared to teach in high poverty schools, and a narrative of social class in the Black community.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are essential to the reader's understanding and context of this work:

Social class – a socially constructed position in society dependent on an individual's level of wealth, power, and prestige (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999);

Poverty - Having insufficient funds to purchase basic necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing; chronic dehabilitating conditions that affect the mind, body, and soul (Jensen, 2009);

Black person – descendent of African Diaspora born in United States, also referred to as African-American, Afro-American, and Negro depending on the generation of reference;

Black middle class - Black families that earn more than $50,000 annually, have professional positions such as doctors, lawyers, accountants, engineers, or corporate managers, live in highly desirable neighborhoods, and have a lifestyle similar to the White middle class (Lacy, 2007);

High Poverty schools - Schools that are oversized, under-funded, and located in poor working class communities, comprised of mainly non-White and linguistic minorities and often headed by single parent households (Singer, 1996);

Preservice Teacher – a student enrolled in an approved teacher education program who aspires to become a classroom teacher after completing course requirements and passing a teacher competency exam;

Boundaries - an anthropological term conceptualized by Frederick Barth which provides an analysis of how ethnic groups negotiate social boundaries amongst themselves.

Statement of the Problem

A review of the literature reveals that one of the most critical issues in the field of teacher education is how to effectively prepare preservice teachers to work with diverse students (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 1999; Feng, 2005; Kea & Utley, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2001; Vaughan, 2005). Diversity in education includes the race, ethnicity, gender, social class, exceptionality, and sexual orientation of students. The current demographics of teachers compared to the composition of today's public school students demonstrate a need for traditional teacher education programs to ensure preservice teachers are systematically prepared for diverse classrooms and communities. Education in both communities of color and in poor White communities is in a state of crisis (Sleeter, 2001). Banks (1991) predicted that by 2020 one out of two school-age children will be a person of color. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2009), the percentage of White public school students decreased from 78% to 56% between 1972 and 2007, while the percentage of students of color increased from 22% to 44% during the same span of years. Statistics provided by the 2010 Census illustrate that children represent a disproportionate share of individuals living in poverty in the United States. In 2010, 16.4 million children or 22.0 percent resided in poverty.

Black children represent 38.2 percent of children under 18 living in poverty. Given this knowledge, teachers cannot just be aware of changing demographics, but must be equipped with knowledge, skills, and values to meet the needs of diverse learners (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 1999; Feng, 2005; Kea & Utley, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2001; Vaughan, 2005).

As discussed by Ladson-Billings (1999), preparing teachers for diverse populations is "difficult, if not impossible" (p. 240). Many teacher education programs confine diversity preparation to a course, workshop, or module that students are mandated to complete for certification requirements. Additionally, external accrediting agencies are not as strict in monitoring the multicultural understanding of preservice teachers as in other content areas of teacher certification assessments. Though teacher preparation programs may require field experiences in diverse settings, the standards for measuring their effectiveness vary. Another problem experienced at even highly regarded institutions deals with the lack of faculty members who are persons of color teaching in teacher education programs (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

In addition to analyzing who is preparing teacher candidates, there are conflicting views concerning who should be recruited in teacher education programs. Studies reviewed by Sleeter (2001) offer two viewpoints. The first strategy encourages the recruitment of more teachers of color because preservice students of color bring a richer multicultural knowledge base to teacher education; and they are typically more committed to the aspects of multicultural teaching, social justice, and ensuring children of color receive an academically challenging curriculum. The second approach, supported by Haberman, is to recruit only those individuals who bring diverse experiences,

knowledge, and dispositions that will enable them to perform well in teacher education programs and have an open mindedness towards teaching in culturally diverse schools (Sleeter, 2001). Haberman (1995), who suggested that selection is more important than training in preparing preservice teachers, cited exemplary teacher education programs as those that include the following four dimensions of excellence: recruit students over the age of 30, demonstrate the ability to establish rapport with high poverty urban students, admit candidates based on valid interviews that predict success in urban schools, and utilize effective inservice urban teachers during the interview process to select preservice teacher candidates. Haberman (1995) also proposed training preservice teachers in the most challenging urban schools and under the poorest working conditions.

According to data compiled by the National Education Association, 90% of United States teachers are White and 79% are female (NEA, 2004). While the number of White female teachers is rising, the number of teachers of color is on the decline. Teachers of color comprised approximately 12% of the teaching force in the 1970s compared to 6% in the 1990s (Gay, 1997; Hunter-Boykin, 1992).

Another issue that compounds the problem of unprepared teachers is the lack of diversity among faculty in teacher education programs. Gay (1997) shared that one of the most powerful variables in determining *how* teachers teach is directly related to the training they received in a teacher education program. Ninety percent of teacher education faculty members are White, have not taught P-12 or college students with diverse backgrounds, and received their formal education when schools were monocultural and segregated (Gasbarro & Matthews, 1994; Ladson-Billings 2001).

In reviewing literature for this study, I examined sources which primarily detail how teachers are prepared to teach in high poverty schools. While the current literature characteristically outlines how White preservice teachers are prepared to teach in high poverty schools, there is not a comprehensive review of how Black middle and upper class teachers, who share a racial identity but not the same cultural capital and social class, are prepared to teach in high poverty schools. This study will examine perceptions of Black middle and upper class pre-service teachers on teaching and learning in high poverty urban schools. Though Black middle and upper class preservice teachers may share a similar racial history with their future students in high poverty urban schools, their social class and economic backgrounds may differ significantly. Jensen (2009) stated, "Many non-minority or middle class teachers cannot understand why children from poor backgrounds act the way they do at school" (p. 11). My research interests pertain to Black middle class preservice teachers who do not have familiarity with negotiating high poverty communities. Do Black middle and upper class preservice teachers believe they are equipped to teach in high poverty schools because they most likely share the same racial identity with their students? How does this group of preservice teachers engage in reflective conversations pertaining to negotiating a different type of boundary crossing? What is the nature of these conversations? My intention was to add to the limited body of knowledge specific to Black middle and upper class preservice teachers and their perceptions of teaching and learning in high poverty urban schools.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

Teacher Preparation

Based on current teacher demographics, colleges and universities must confront issues of teacher preparation and critically reflect on instructional practices for their teacher candidates to experience success, reach all students, and remain in their chosen careers. Gloria Ladson-Billings provides a theoretical framework for teacher preparation to enhance the success of preservice teachers working in diverse communities. Culturally responsive pedagogy is a fusion and enhancement of the terms culturally appropriate, culturally compatible, and culturally congruent (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested using a culturally responsive pedagogy to increase the achievement of diverse students, as well as change the mindset of teachers who will serve these students. In addition to being familiar with how students of color learn, Ladson-Billings (1995) stated that "by observing the students in their home/community environment, teachers were able to include aspects of the students' cultural environment in the organization and instruction of the classroom (p. 467). Ladson-Billings (1995) questioned the implications of teacher pedagogy that promote student success while overlooking societal issues that affect classroom learning such as race and class (1995). Nieto (1994) shared a similar sentiment and suggested that teachers and schools need to build on, rather than tear down what students bring to school.

Ladson-Billings (1995) emphasized in her theory of culturally relevant pedagogy that culturally relevant teachers exhibit the following broad qualities that are situated within the underlying propositions: (a) Conceptions of Self and Others – suggests that culturally relevant teachers hold high expectations for all students, believe all students are

capable of achieving academic excellence, see themselves as members of the community who are giving back to the community, and view their teaching pedagogy as an evolving art; (b) Social Relations – implies that culturally relevant teachers establish and maintain positive teacher-student relationships and classroom learning communities, are passionate about teaching, and view it as service to the community; and (c) Conceptions of Knowledge – suggests that culturally relevant teachers view knowledge as fluid and facilitate students' ability to construct their own understanding. Ladson-Billings (1995) provided a context for illuminating instructional practices that facilitate the academic success and cultural competence of traditionally underserved student populations.

In addition to implementing these practices, teachers learning culturally responsive pedagogy must be caring and have personal accountability, a coherent vision, a desire to make a change, and a concrete understanding of themselves and their knowledge base (Aminy & Neophytos-Richardson, 2002; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Haberman, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2006). Teachers who recognize who they are as individuals, understand the context in which they teach, and are able to critically question their knowledge base and perceived assumptions, have a solid foundation and will begin their careers as effective teachers (Aminy & Neophytos-Richardson, 2002; Gaudelli & Ousley, 2009; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Nieto, 2006). Further elements of culturally responsive teaching include dismantling unequal distributions of power and privilege and teaching diverse students cultural competence about themselves and each other (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Concurrently, teachers who become the authors of their own stories and reflections grow to be change agents and realize the powerful influence that culture and previous experience have on present

thoughts and actions (Aminy & Neophytos-Richardson, 2002; Gaudelli & Ousley; Nieto, 2006).

Darling-Hammond (2008) suggested that to best meet the cognitive, social, physical, and emotional needs of students, teachers must collaborate to create powerful learning through experiential learning and discuss the connection between differences that arise due to cultural and family backgrounds and student achievement. She defined experiential learning as the "rub between theory and practice" that questions the context of learning with real students versus textbook examples (p. 93). In addition to providing hands on learning, experiential learning reinforces social and ethical values, improves reflection and collaboration, creates better trained workers, and leads to a seamless transition of incorporating service learning into college courses (Anderson, 1998; Cantor, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 2008).

The current literature demonstrates a need for drastic changes in the preparation of teachers for diverse classrooms, and a national standard for excellence among teacher education programs. The implications of restructuring multicultural education to include a greater focus on social class in teacher education programs are paramount and an attainable goal (Smith & Smith, 2008). Hilliard (1991) pointed out, "Just as there is vast untapped potential, yes, genius, among the children, there is also untapped potential among the teachers who serve the children" (p. 35). If we expect teachers to be excellent, we must instill excellence and the will to educate all students in them. Hilliard (1991) suggested that the potential of teachers has been undervalued.

Characteristics of Successful Teachers in High Poverty Urban Schools

Teachers of students in poverty must possess a reflective teaching pedagogy that supports a student's academic achievement, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Smith & Smith, 2009). Additionally, these teachers must understand the role culture plays in education, take responsibility for learning about a student's culture and community, create a community of learners, and promote a flexible and positive use of a student's local and global culture (Delpit, 1995; Kunjufu, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Smith & Smith, 2009). Kunjufu (2002) wrote that master teachers are highly enthusiastic about teaching, are lifelong learners, set high expectations, engage their students, and create a bond with their students before delivering instruction. Additionally, successful urban teachers must be able to translate middle class standards to their students (Kunjufu, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Wilson, 1978). This is defined as instruction in middle class values, discourse including grammar, style, and mechanics, proper etiquette and hygiene, and conducting one's self with modesty (Delpit, 1995; Smith & Smith, 2009). Ladson-Billings (2009) described successful teachers as possessing experience and being able to pinpoint the defining moment in their teaching career that forced them to reassess the manner in which they taught.

Haberman (1995) referred to teachers of students in poverty as those who teach in one of the 120 largest urban school districts in the United States, which serve approximately 12 million students. He estimated that only five to eight percent of teachers in high poverty urban schools are star teachers, or those who consistently have students who rank high on standardized assessments, receive positive comments from

parents and students, receive outstanding performance ratings from administrators, are regarded highly by peers and cooperating universities, and evaluate themselves as superior. Haberman (1995) proposed that teaching in a high poverty urban school is a life changing experience that involves "a volatile, highly charged, emotionally draining, physically exhausting experience for even the most competent, experienced teacher. For beginners, the pressures, intensity, and emotional commitments are beyond belief and almost beyond description" (p. 1). Additionally, Haberman (1991) shaped a definition for a pedagogy of poverty that encompasses what teachers do, what students expect, and what parents and the community assume teaching to be. He mentioned fourteen minimal aspects of urban education, including giving information, asking questions, giving directions, making assignments, monitoring seatwork, reviewing assignments, giving tests, reviewing tests, assigning homework, reviewing homework, settling disputes, punishing non-compliance, marking papers, and giving grades. Haberman (1991) suggested these ritualistic acts of instruction appeal to teachers of the poor and minorities, those with low expectations and limited vision, and those who are unaware of pedagogy that leads to critical analysis, creativity, and problem solving skills. While there are instances when each of these instructional acts are beneficial, when performed together they represent a primary means of instruction and exclude a full range of additional and higher level pedagogical options available to teachers (Haberman, 1991).

Winfield (1986) outlined teacher beliefs to explain the relationship between teachers and students. These beliefs led to the construction of the following educator roles: tutors, general contractors, custodians, referral agents, conductors, coaches, and master teachers. Although these beliefs are widely used to categorize teachers who do or

do not seek to improve instruction and assume responsibility for learning, Winfield's analysis does not focus on the social class of the teacher (Kunjufu, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Tutors believe high poverty students can improve and believe it is their job as a teacher to help students improve. General contractors believe improvement is possible but look to others in the school to provide support rather than assume responsibility themselves. Custodians do not believe students can be assisted and do not look for support personnel for resources. Referral agents do not believe their students can be helped and shift responsibility away from themselves towards special education teachers and school psychologists. Moving towards a more culturally relevant pedagogy, conductors believe students are capable of excellence and assume responsibility to ensure excellence is reached. Coaches also believe their students are capable of excellence, but share responsibility with students, community members, and parents to reach success. Master teachers, similar to coaches, set high expectations, develop a personal relationship with their students, are aware of primetime instructional moments, spend less time with discipline because they have instilled a family oriented classroom environment, ask open ended questions, and are lifetime learners (Kunjufu, 2002).

As with coaches and master teachers, successful teachers of children in poverty are persistent and stubborn in their belief that children have potential to learn. Without fail, these teachers embrace and maintain student engagement and organize the classroom environment to ensure that learning takes place incessantly. Effective teachers in high poverty schools are willing to persevere through disappointments and major emotional investment. They do not wear down easily, nor do they blame the students for their inadequacies. Rather, these master teachers assume the responsibility for doing more for

their students. They inherently believe and demonstrate to others that success is a result of persistence and effort, and that students have great potential if given plentiful motivation and opportunity (Cuthrell et al, 2007; Kunjufu, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Needs of Black Learners in High Poverty Urban Schools

Sobering and authentic statistics paint a vivid portrait of the state of education in the Black community and support the need for additional literature geared towards the specific needs of Black urban children (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lomotey, 1992). Ladson-Billings (2009) offered concrete examples of the plight of Black urban children in today's schools. Black children continue to perform lower academically compared to White peers, are three times more likely to drop out of school and two times more likely to be suspended. Black students comprise 17 percent of the total school population and make up 41 percent of the special education population. Additionally, one of every two Black children resides in poverty. A Black child is five times more likely to depend on public assistance, and if living in California is three times more likely to be murdered than admitted to the University of California (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Lomotey (1992) had similar arguments, citing teacher attitudes as a contributing factor to the failing academic achievement of a large number of Black children as evidenced by standardized achievement test sores, suspension rates, special education placement, and dropout rates.

It is especially important for teachers working in diverse schools to recognize that, "A black child is not a white child who happens to be painted black" (Wilson, 1978, p. 6). Students from various cultures may have different social skills, acceptable wording and gestures, and environmental forces that shape their behavior. Thus, culturally relevant teaching must be studied to meet the needs of all classroom learners. A strong

proponent of quality education for Black children, Hale (1994) stated that "educational gains for African-American children will be enhanced only when their socioeconomic circumstances and distinctive culture are acknowledged and are used to inform education practice" (page xix). A Black child is a descendent of the African Diaspora; therefore, Hale (1994) argued that the mismatch between mainstream American culture and Black culture accounts for a significant explanation of why schools fail to understand and support Black children. All aspects of life including socioeconomic status, culture, region, and religion, need to be considered to describe a realistic representation of the variety among Black children and how their existence has been socially constructed through the years as a result of historical, economic, and political factors (Hale, 1994). Wilson (1978) emphasized that "the black child should be the body of studies and books in child development and not treated as a mere appendage to the body of white child developmental studies" (p. 66). Additionally, Wilson (1978) stated that this omission "has been the greatest failure of American developmental, educational and clinical psychology" (p. 8). The inclusion of Black child psychology in teacher education programs seems appropriate since a large portion of teachers in urban communities teach Black students and could gain knowledge on pedagogy and practices to help students experience academic, emotional, and social success.

Epistemology

A philosophical base for any study must be provided to ensure the type of knowledge gained is both adequate and legitimate (Crotty, 1998). According to Perry (1981), epistemology refers holistically to one's held beliefs about how and what knowledge is gained and formed and the limitations for defining knowledge. To

determine how middle and upper class Black preservice teachers perceive teaching in high poverty urban schools, I used constructionism as my epistemological frame. Constructionism is the way of comprehending and explaining how we know what we know and it illustrates the individual person engaging with objects of the world and making meaning of them (Crotty, 1998). Crotty (1998) stated:

> What, then is constructionism? It is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. (p. 42)

Another belief of constructionists is offered by Neimeyer (1993), who stated that constructionists "do not have direct access to a singular, stable, and fully knowable external reality. All of our understandings are contextually embedded, interpersonally forged, and necessarily limited" (p. 1-2). In essence, constructionists consider "notions of truth to be a consensus among informed and sophisticated constructors, not of correspondence with an objective reality" (Patton, 2002, p.96).

The term constructionism, also embedded in social constructionism, derives from the works of Marx (1859) who linked the economic base of society to human behavior, Berger and Luckman (1967) who studied how social relations and material objects permeate everyday realities, and early pragmatists whose beliefs were constructionist in nature (Crotty, 1998). Marx (1859) suggested the social being of men determines their consciousness. Constructionism states that meaning is constructed by people as they interact with the world they are discovering (Crotty, 1998; Patton, 2002).

In qualitative inquiry, constructionism emphasizes capturing and honoring multiple perspectives, the importance of considering the relationship between the researcher and the participants, how relationships affect findings, and the ambiguous

interpretations of viewpoints (Crotty, 1998; Patton, 2002). As it relates to this current study, constructionism accurately describes the social construction of the class system both within the United States and among Black Americans. Epistemologies of constructionism are built on the belief that knowing is not passive and the notion that the mind is active and constructs knowledge (Schwandt, 2000). Through the use of constructionism, my intention was to add to the body of knowledge pertaining to teacher perceptions, specifically how Black middle and upper class preservice teachers negotiate social class while interacting with students in high poverty urban schools.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is boundaries, an anthropological term conceptualized by Barth (1969). Boundaries provides an analysis of how ethnic groups negotiate social boundaries amongst themselves. Because identities are socially constructed through a group's interaction with each other, Barth (1969) argued that ethnic groups define themselves by establishing and protecting boundaries between themselves and outsiders. Contradicting a traditional assumption among anthropologists, Barth (1969) maintained that group identity does not emerge from a group's isolation from other cultures, but from ongoing contact with other cultural groups. Barth (1969) stated that "a race = a culture = a language and that a society = a unit which rejects or discriminates against others" (p. 11). Though Barth (1969) studied European ethnic groups, his work can relate to social class in the Black community because the individuals with whom Black middle and upper middle class community members come in contact shape their personal self-conceptions, including their interactions with lower class Blacks. Lacy (2007) discussed how middle class Blacks erect exclusionary

boundaries around lower class Blacks by disassociating themselves from commonly held stereotypical Black behavior, emphasizing shared White experiences, and highlighting educational and professional credentials. According to Barth (1969) the identification of another person as a fellow member of an ethnic group implies a sharing of criteria for evaluation and judgment. It assumes that the two are fundamentally "playing the same game," and means there a potential between them for diversification and expansion of their social relationship to cover eventually all different sectors and domains of activity.

As illustrated by the literature review, boundaries informed the work of this research study by creating a framework for the research questions. With constructionist theory, I explored teacher perceptions through the lens of social class and its effect on Black middle and upper class preservice teachers. Boundaries offered a relevant and reflective framework to illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of Black middle and upper class preservice teachers' pedagogical practices and students' learning in high poverty urban schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions were guided in this study:

1. What are the perceptions of Black middle and upper class preservice teachers regarding teaching and learning in high poverty urban schools?
2. To what extent do Black middle and upper class preservice teachers believe they can be successful teachers in high poverty urban schools?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Social Class and Schooling

Social class is an essential element in the field of education. It is conceivably one of the most significant sources of inequality in schools and was one of the first factors, after intelligence, researched by scholars as a source of difference in achievement (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999; Lareau, 1987). Class, a social construction, is often linked to ethnicity, race, and gender and it is difficult to have a discussion about one topic without referencing the other (Cole & Omari, 2003; deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999; Kunjufu, 2002; Rist, 2000). In the United States, social class origins are often overlooked, and more emphasis is placed on race and ethnicity (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999). Social class is defined as a series of relationships often defined by one's occupation and income, as well as how a person relates to a process by which goods, services, and culture are produced (Aynon, 1980). Pattillo-McCoy (1999) defined social class as an elusive concept based on socioeconomic factors and normative judgments. Social class affects the experiences of women and people of color, especially in the United States where more emphasis is often placed on race and ethnicity. Therefore, it is necessary to consider all aspects of a child's life and demonstrate the complexities and intersection of race, class, and gender in classrooms across America (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999; Lareau, 1987; Loewen, 1996).

According to deMarrais & LeCompte (1999), "social scientists define social classes as groups of people who share certain characteristics of prestige, patterns of taste and language, income, occupational status (though not necessarily the same jobs),

educational level, aspirations, behavior, and beliefs" (p. 196). An individual's place in society is dependent on the level of his or her wealth, power, and prestige. As with cultural capital, the social class that is most valued is possessed by the dominant culture. Cultural capital encompasses an individual's manners of talking and acting, moving, dressing, socializing, tastes, likes and dislikes, competencies, and literary and artistic forms of knowledge (Bourdieu, 2001; Delpit, 1988; deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999). School children are often judged on how closely their cultural capital and social class mirror values of the dominant society, which are usually White middle class values (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999; Loewen, 1996; Wilson, 1978). Children who do not meet those standards are perceived to be less capable of academic achievement than their peers who have a command of the proper dialect, communication style, and manners (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999).

Within the realms of today's classrooms, discussions of social class are typically combined with conversations about race since race, poverty, and low rates of educational achievement are highly correlated. Students who reside in low income communities are often given less encouragement, have less interaction with the teacher, receive less rigorous class work, and have lower expectations for success from teachers (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999; Jensen, 2009). Studies focused on risk and resilience demonstrate that family income is highly correlated to a child's academic success during preschool, kindergarten, and the primary years (Jenson, 2009).

Loewen (1996) stated that teachers often ignore discussions on social class as it relates to American history, which is a disservice to students who need to learn the truth about how social class and race impacted historical inaccuracies. As reflected in the

research of deMarrais and LeCompte (1999) and Jensen (2009), social class creates more detrimental levels of subordination than any other distinction. Rich people, regardless of their race, religion, or gender, are more similar to one another than a poor person sharing their race, religion, or gender (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999; Jensen, 2009). These differences are perpetuated by an educational system that is socially constructed and carries the values of the White middle class (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999; Jensen, 2009). Research by deMarrais & LeCompte (1999) has demonstrated that teachers favor children who share their personal values, despite the student's academic ability. Since many teachers were either born into or acquired cultural capital through their own educational advancement, and have the habits and aspirations of the middle class, many find it difficult to interact with students who do not share the same.

Research by Bourdieu (1998) addressed how and why individuals' tend to interact within familiar settings. Bourdieu (1998) defines habitus as a system of dispositions and perceptions that are constructed over time and shape how individuals make sense of and act on a particular field. Habitus merges the structure of a field and individual's preferences and everyday choices of activities. It organizes the way individuals perceive objects, events, and actions; systematizes the social world for individuals; and, guides how individuals act in their world (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Cannata, 2010). It is important to note that habitus is not unitary or fixed, and individuals can interact in multiple social contexts. Experiences across various social spaces influence one's habitus, changing the habitus over time or being expressed in different ways as we move between varieties of contexts. Consequently one person may be socially proximal to spaces that are relatively distant from each other. Habitus is somewhat long-lasting

because it reinforces itself by moving toward similar experiences and away from dissimilar ones, which gives more credence to early experiences and contexts (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1980; Cannata, 2010). Habitus is practiced in teacher education through the process in which teachers make career decisions. Cannata (2010) studied teacher applicants' actions and attitudes during their initial job searches. Since habitus is controlled by individuals' social position, Cannata (2010) found that teacher applicants from different cultural and social backgrounds behave differently because their habitus has opposing principles. Teacher applicants were more likely to desire schools that were socially proximal to their own social and cultural position. When individuals with similar habitus were brought together, they felt a bond with each other that was connected to having comparable social experiences and conditionings.

Studies of the school curriculum, hidden curriculum, social organization of the classroom, and authoritative relationship between teachers and students suggest ways schools contribute to social reproduction and maintaining middle class values in the schools (Aynon, 1980; Lareau, 1987). Bourdieu (1977) proposed that schools draw disproportionately on social and cultural resources of the mainstream society, including linguistic structures, curriculum, and patterns of authority. The cultural experiences of a child's home life dictate his or her success in a school environment. Lareau (1987) found that class provided social and cultural resources, but the resources must be utilized to manifest into cultural capital.

A 1970 study on social class and teacher expectations in education by Rist suggested that non-poor parents prefer to have their children attend school with those of a similar class, not poor children. Studying children in four schools of varying social

classes in St. Louis, Rist (1970) discovered that African American responded to the same social class forces that influence the behaviors and values of other groups in society. Rist (1970) found that in an all-Black school, social class became pivotal in the construction of reality. The relation between the social class of the students and their academic tracking was a prevailing variable in understanding their current and future treatment within school settings. He concluded that race did not supersede class, but that together they created a powerful interaction. His research, which was updated in 2000, demonstrated that little had changed in the thirty years since conducting his first study. Rist (2000) found that urban schools were currently no better prepared than thirty years prior in addressing issues of color and class within public schools.

Kunjufu (2002) was inspired to write *Black Students, Middle Class Teachers* after a principal experienced difficulty in social class and value conflict between Black middle class teachers and poor Black students. Kunjufu (2002) detailed many middle class school scenarios, including assumptions made by practitioners who discount classism among Black teachers and students. Teachers, who play a pivotal role in nurturing and educating youth, are often the crucial link in advancing children from poor communities (Cuthrell, Stapleton, & Ledford, 2010; Haberman, 1995; Rist, 2009). Teacher quality, longevity, and intentions can make or break a child's zeal to learn. A teacher's expectation of a student's academic performance has a strong influence on the student's actual performance. An important question also becomes, who is willing to teach in today's urban schools? In the past, Black teachers valued jobs in the inner city because it afforded them a stable middle class income (Hunter-Boykin, 1992; Rist, 2009). With the increase in the Black middle class community and decrease in the number of Black

teachers, Black teachers are no longer confined to teaching in poor communities (Rist, 2009).

Research by Hunter-Boykin (1992) and Kunjufu (2002) suggest that Black teachers are more likely than White teachers to leave the teaching profession because of veteran teacher's advanced age and younger teacher's failure rates on national teacher competency tests. A study by Hunter-Boykin (1992) revealed that 37% of Black teachers had 20 or more years experience compared to 30% of White teachers. The Praxis II is designed to measure knowledge of content, general pedagogy and content-specific pedagogy in 41 states (Tyler, ETS, & NEA; 2011). A 2011 collaboration by Tyler, the Education Testing Service (ETS), and the National Education Association (NEA) reported a -34.8 percent gap between White and Black preservice teachers who took the Praxis II in Elementary Education: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. Additionally, there was a -19.6 percent gap between White and Black preservice teachers who took the Praxis II Elementary Education: Content Area Exercises and a -35.0 percent gap on the Elementary Education: Content Knowledge section.

Historically, Black teachers taught in predominately Black schools because of segregationist practices. Upon reviewing the literature, several themes emerge conveying the importance of schools in the Black community. The research offers the conclusion that schools were more than educational facilities and teachers served a greater purpose than educating young minds. Schools were the backbone of the community that provided quality teaching, high expectations and academic achievement, and cultural values (Ascik, 1984; Fairclough, 2007; Irvine & Irvine, 1983; Jones, 1978; Kunjufu, 2002; Siddle Walker, 2000). Kunjufu (2002) and Fairclough (2007) argued that racism

afforded many Black students the opportunity to be taught by the best and brightest Black minds.

When schools finally desegregated in the United States in the 1970s after the enforcement of *Brown v. Board of Education*, approximately 38,000 Black teachers and administrators in 17 states were displaced between 1954 and 1965 (Hunter-Boykin, 1992; Milner & Howard, 2004). This loss was profound because Black teachers served as surrogate parents, disciplinarians, counselors, role models, and advocates for Black student's overall development (Milner & Howard, 2004; Siddle Walker 1996; 2000). When Black teachers lost their voice in desegregation, Black students lost advocates, cultural understanding, and teachers who believed in their academic abilities. Nationally, the loss of Black teachers during desegregation had a significant consequence on the quality of teaching that Black students received in public schools. Within segregated schools, Black teachers were often experienced, concerned, and familiar with the cultural norms of their students. The administrators had impressive credentials and lived in the community. Many Black educators attended schools in the North during the summer, traveled, and participated in regional professional development to advance their learning and careers (Siddle Walker, 1996; 2000). There was a high level of care that permeated educational facilities, a belief in the student's capacity to succeed, as well as a sense of balance between home and school for students.

The percentage of Black teachers in the United States has been the lowest since 1971. This decline is associated with the era of desegregation (Hunter-Boykin, 1992; Kunjufu, 2002; NEA, 2006). *The Condition of Education 2010* states that only 7% of full-time teachers are Black. This is in sharp contrast to the percentage of students of

color which increased from 22% to 44% during between 1972 and 2007 (NCES, 2010). Furthermore, in high poverty urban schools, 40% to 50% of the teachers transfer within their first five years of teaching for other professions or schools in higher socioeconomic communities (Dee, 2004; Haberman 1995; Holt & Garcia, 2005). Within high poverty schools, those that are almost 100% minority are often taught by a majority White teaching force, depending on the region of the United States (Kunjufu, 2002). These alarming gaps and rates detail the critical need for highly skilled and qualified Black teachers.

Traditionally, the largest percentage of Black teachers received their teacher preparation at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), which have been enhanced through legal decisions and federal initiatives. In 1977, *Adams v. Richardson* ordered states to strengthen and enhance HBCUs to become full partners in providing educational services and called for a commitment from individual states to ensure HBCUs had the same resources as predominately White colleges and universities (Hunter-Boykin, 1992). More recently, efforts by President Barack Obama have promoted excellence, innovation, and sustainability through the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (United States Department of Education, 2010).

Though enrollment and interest in HBCUs is steady, there are varied reasons for the decrease in the number of Black college students entering the teaching profession. While the older generation of Blacks regarded teaching as a long term commitment, many of today's college students view teaching as a stepping stone toward a more lucrative career (Kunjufu, 2002). Additionally, many were encouraged by their educator

parents not to enter the teaching profession because of the lack of discipline in schools (Kunjufu, 2002).

Although their research focused on Black teachers in desegregated suburban schools, Mabokela and Madsen (2003) found that cultural identity among teachers affects the way they are socialized and embraced into an organization. Included in their research, cultural identity acknowledges one's sense of self as a cultural being and having manners in which the culture is reflected within the norms and values of the group. A consequence of intergroup tensions includes being pressured to act unnaturally and having a split identity at work and at home. Boundary heightening occurs when an individual from a different environment from the majority enters an organization. The heightened awareness of differences that exist between the majority and minority brings frustration, overreliance on stereotypes, and culture shock (Mabokela and Madsen, 2003). While their study pertains to Black teachers in predominately White suburban schools, the same notions of difference can be found with Black middle class teachers in high poverty schools. In both situations, there is a level of unfamiliarity that includes social class (Mabokela and Madsen, 2003).

Social Class in the Black Community

The stereotype that Black Americans are working class and impoverished is one that White America assumes and that mainstream media portrays as an accurate account of the Black experience in America (Cole & Omari, 2003; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). However, elitism and class structure within the Black community, although usually discussed only within the Black community, is quite relevant and mirrors the same class structure in other racial and ethnic groups (Cole & Omari, 2003; Frazier, 1957; Graham,

2000). Individuals born into privilege, regardless of race, are socialized to not recognize their own privileges. Privilege may be acknowledged, but the privileged tend to deny their own privilege (Gallavan, 2005). In the Black community, color and class have been inexorably linked for generations dating back to slavery when the concept of the field and house slave were distinctive (Cole & Omari, 2003; Graham, 2000; Lacy, 2007; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). According to Frazier (1957), the Black middle class in America originated with Northern Blacks who were free prior to the Civil War. This group of individuals was able to acquire wealth through land purchases and establishing small businesses and had accumulated $50,000,000 in real estate and personal property prior to the Civil War. The Black middle class in the South took form through education that was received from northern White missionaries who molded the minds of newly freed Blacks into Puritan thought, piety, thrift, and respectability (Frazier, 1957). As the years progressed, Pattillo-McCoy (1999) stated that the Civil Rights movement gave rise to the Black middle class as upwardly mobile Blacks integrated predominately White occupations, businesses, neighborhoods, and social clubs.

While Frazier (1957) studied the Black bourgeoisie in the 1950s, current research by Lacy (2007) suggests there are two types of groups of middle class Blacks in America. The lower middle class Black family earns between $30,000 and $50,000 annually and comprises approximately 65% of the Black middle class. These families often live in racially segregated communities with underperforming schools, do not hold college degrees, are concentrated in sales or clerical positions, and do not share commonality with the White middle class (Lacy, 2007). Middle class Black families earn more than $50,000 annually, have professional positions such as doctors, lawyers, accountants,

engineers, teachers, or corporate managers, live in highly desirable neighborhoods, make up 35 percent of the Black middle class, and have a lifestyle mirroring the White middle class (Lacy, 2007). One difference in the middle class lifestyle of Blacks and Whites is that Black middle class households include two working parents and often receive assistance by extended family in raising children (McAdoo, 1978; Lacy, 2007). Because of their more stable finances, professional positions, and residential preferences in contrast to lower middle class Blacks, the upper 35% of the Black middle class, including 4% with incomes above $100,000, is the focus of this study.

To examine the social construction of class in the Black community, Graham (2000) researched the Black upper class including the proper private schools, summer camps, and colleges to attend, prestigious social organizations and churches to join, coveted vacation locations to visit, and prominent neighborhoods to reside in (Cole & Omari, 2009). Among the Black elite, or old-guard, tradition is highly regarded as well as family background and accomplishment. The criteria and strict standards of who belonged in the old guard was based on light skin color, wealth, attending the proper educational institutions, an acceptable family background, and membership in exclusive social organizations (Cole & Omari, 2009). Appropriate colleges for Black upper class children primarily include Spelman College, Morehouse College, and Howard University because of their relationship with corporate America and the professional community. Although there are members of the Black elite who use their success to assist those who are less fortunate, there is a faction who feels superior and is embarrassed by less accomplished members of the race (Cole & Omari, 2009; Graham, 2000).

Lacy (2007) focused her research on how Black middle and upper class families socialized their children to negotiate their own social identities, as well as nurturing and maintaining a middle class identity. In realizing cultural identities, boundaries form between middle class and lower class Blacks (Graham, 2000; Lacy, 2007). Cultural capital, an important signifier of middle class status, indicates a "proficiency in and familiarity with dominant culture codes and practices – for example, linguistic styles, aesthetic preferences, styles of interaction" (p. 77, Lacy, 2007). Lacy's research found that middle and upper class Blacks reinforced their status by erecting boundaries against lower class Blacks through residential locations, school quality, providing luxuries for their children, encouraging their children to assume the financial burden of Black middle class life, and focusing on character building. The Black families she studied in Washington, DC wanted their children to be successful members of the White world and socialized their children with other suburban Black children. Conversely, these same parents did not want their children alienated from the larger Black community as a result of their middle class status. In contrast, Hwang, Fitzpatrick, and Helms (1998) found that middle class Blacks disidentify and distance themselves from the Black working class and are more accepting of government policies and social relations if they have benefitted from them. This class realignment can cause middle class Blacks to have more politically conservative views on government spending and structurally analyzed causes of inequality, and be more politically active than the Black working class (Hwang, Fitzpatrick, and Helms, 1998).

How Preservice Teachers Negotiate Social Class

Delpit (1988) stated,

> But both sides do need to be able to listen, and I contend that it is those with the most power, those in the majority, who must take the greater responsibility for initiating the process. To do so takes a very special kind of listening, listening that requires not only open eyes and ears, but open hearts and minds. We do not really see through our eyes or ears, but through our beliefs. To put our beliefs on hold is to cease to exist as ourselves for a moment – and that is not easy….It is not easy, but it is the only way to learn what it might feel like to be someone else and the only way to start the dialogue. (p. 297)

This quotation describes how teacher educators learn to understand their personal prejudices and confront differences in values and culture (Smith & Smith, 2009). This is a salient objective for teacher educators in understanding high poverty urban communities. Extreme poverty is defined as a family of three living on an annual income of $7,870 or less (Cuthrell, Stapleton, & Ledford, 2010).

Children born into poverty, which include households with insufficient funds to purchase basic necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing, suffer from chronic dehabilitating conditions that affect the mind, body, and soul (Jensen, 2009). Examples of hardships and conditions of poverty include emotional and social challenges, inadequate schools, poor nutrition, teen pregnancy, poor prenatal care, low maternal education, unsupportive home life, cognitive lags, and health disparities (Cuthrell, Stapleton, & Ledford, 2010; Holt & Garcia, 2005; Jensen, 2009).

According to statistics from the Children's Defense Fund (2011), a child is born into poverty every 34 seconds. This equates to over 18 million children in the United States living in poverty (Cuthrell et al, 2007). Characteristics of schools located in high poverty urban communities include facilities that are usually overcrowded and under-funded, comprised mainly of non-White and linguistic minorities, and headed by single

parent households (Singer, 1996). Preservice teachers, the majority of whom are White and middle class, must learn to teach with cultural relevance, provide a safe haven, be overtly political, and empower students to defy social injustice in both the classroom and society (Singer, 1996). Successful teachers are those who teach with an intrinsic love of learning. They keep their student's educational, social, and emotional needs as a priority, and cultivate relationships beyond the classroom to ensure the academic success of their students (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Singer, 1996).

There have been numerous studies emphasizing the need for a specific type of knowledge, teaching pedagogy, and dispositions for teachers to work successfully in high poverty schools (Delpit, 1988; Haberman, 1991; Holt & Garcia, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009). However, social class of the teacher has rarely been discussed. Although Ladson-Billings (2009) researched successful teachers of Black students, social class did not play a significant role in her analysis. Haberman (1991), who concentrated on characteristics of successful teachers of children in poverty, did not directly address the impact of students' race or culture. Delpit (1988) encouraged teachers to begin where their students were and not impose cultural assumptions based on White, middle class standards from professional families who enter school with dissimilar levels of cultural capital.

A 9-year partnership between the University of North Carolina-Greensboro and Hunter Elementary School targeted the gap between skills teachers must learn in order to provide quality instruction in high poverty schools and skills they actually learn before entering the teaching profession (Miller et al, 2005). The program, which offered field experiences for 25 junior and seniors at the university, provided mutual benefit to both the elementary school and university. The field experience cohort provided

individualized instruction for elementary school students and the elementary school teachers provided in-depth supervision that linked field experiences and methods classes. The partnership has yielded an increase on achievement scores for the elementary school students, richer field experiences, and learning connections for preservice teachers who regularly participate in staff development and guided tutorial programs, and more than 1,000 hours instructing high poverty students (Miller et al, 2005).

In Nashville, Tennessee, where 71 of the 126 public schools were classified as high poverty, school administrators reconceptualized their teacher induction, orientation, and professional development opportunities (Holt & Garcia, 2005). Teachers in Nashville received professional development using *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* by Payne (2005), as well as training in differentiated instruction, conflict resolution, behavior management, cultural differences within classrooms, and connecting with families. The district's overall goal was for teachers to not only understand the culture of poverty and specific needs of children, but to also teach with high expectations without making excuses for their students living situations (Holt & Garcia, 2005).

Jensen (2009) recommended that school administrators embrace a new mission to assist teachers in working with children in high poverty schools. He encouraged educators to be aware of how poverty affects learning. Teachers do not have to share the same background as their students to experience success, but empathy and cultural knowledge are essential to increasing student achievement. Jensen suggested that staff development which is both informative and inspiring will deepen understanding of the brain-based physiological effects of poverty, as well as demystify stereotypes of poverty stricken communities. One example of a poverty-related stress is chronic stress disorder.

In the classroom this can manifest through increased impulsivity, poor short term memory, laughing when disciplined, anger, and physical aggressions (Jenson, 2009). An important staff development topic is changing the school culture from pity to empathy. Instead of having a "bless their hearts" mentality, teachers should not lower expectations, but rather learn how it feels to be in the children's circumstance. If a culture of caring is established, teachers will learn to speak respectfully to students and use positive affirmations instead of a condensing tone (Jensen, 2009).

Cuthrell, Stapleton, and Ledford (2010) summarized that poor children are more likely to enter school linguistically disadvantaged because they have not been exposed to rich experiences that promote literacy and reading readiness. Additionally, children of poverty lack educational advantages during summer months when many middle and upper class children attend camps and visit museums which stimulate social and intellectual development. These experiences also reinforce class differences between the haves and have nots. They argue that this widening achievement gap could be decreased by targeting resources to high poverty families, implementing a national preschool program, lowering class sizes in early grades, strengthening early childhood education interventions, and improving teacher quality through teacher education programs and professional development. Gaiber (2009) reports that students are better served by greater investments in high quality teachers opposed to class size reductions. Studies cited by Gaiber outlined the need for teacher education programs to select teacher candidates more rigorously, especially those who will be teaching in urban areas. Gaiber recommended using the Haberman model to select teachers for diverse urban areas who are persistent, are willing to protect learners, realize that personal obstacles can be

overcome, have a professional approach with students, can create support systems, and recognize their own shortcomings (Gaiber, 2009).

Kea, Trent, and Davis (2002) studied Black preservice student teachers attending a southern HBCU. Through participant responses on the Multicultural Teaching Scale, the researchers found that Black preservice teachers are not culturally competent simply by membership in the Black race. A limitation of their study was the exclusion of social class among the demographic information collected which included race, ethnicity, disabilities, religion, language, and immigration status.

Conclusion

While much of the literature discusses the critical need to prepare teachers for children of diversity, there seems to be an assumption that Black preservice teachers do not need the same amount of preparation because they share similar cultural experiences as other people of color. It is likely that Black middle and upper class students have had interactions with lower class Blacks through familial and religious connections, community service opportunities, housing patterns, and school friendships. Drawing on the studies of Ladson-Billings and Haberman, the goal for successful preservice teachers is to teach children, not just have proficiency in subject matter and pedagogy. As stated by Haberman (1995), “For the children and youth in poverty from diverse cultural backgrounds who attend urban schools, having effective teachers is a matter of life and death” (p. 1). Successful teachers expand and achieve their students’ vision of the possibilities in their lives and assist students in changing and challenging the impossible.

This dissertation explores the views of a seldom researched community of preservice teachers. The study examined the perceptions of Black middle and upper class

preservice teahers regarding teaching and learning in high poverty urban schools and the extent to which they believe they can be successful teachers in high poverty urban schools.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This study was conducted using qualitative inquiry to capture the stories of the 11 research participants. The lack of research pertaining to Black middle and upper class preservice teachers and the small sample size were considered when selecting a qualitative method. Qualitative methodology was used to allow data on personal and educational backgrounds and experiences with boundary crossing to naturally emerge from the participants.

Context

This study was situated at a private Historically Black College in the southeast region of the United States. The college, founded in the late 1800s, has an international reputation for successfully educating Black students. There were over 5,000 applicants for the most recent freshman class, and approximately 550 were ultimately accepted and enrolled. According to the information located on the college's website, the current enrollment exceeds 2,000 with students representing 45 of the 50 states and United States territories and nine from foreign countries. The current yearly tuition is over $18,000, excluding room, board, and fees. The college's current endowment totals over $340,000,000. Ninety percent of the students receive some form of financial aid which can be classified as need-based or merit-based.

As referenced in the last National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) report, 64% of students attending the college resided in homes with an annual income above $50,000. Of the 64% living with a household income of $50,000 or greater, 25% of those students reside in households with an annual income over

$100,000 (16% of the student population). Accordingly, this college was chosen because of its substantial number of Black middle class students.

There are approximately 80 students enrolled in the teacher education program. The teacher education program includes the early childhood education majors with Early Childhood Education Teacher Certification for grades preschool – fifth; Secondary Education Teacher Certification in grades 6–12 for select majors; Preschool–12th Grade Teacher Certification for foreign language majors; and a Child Development Minor without Teacher Certification.

Students desiring to be enrolled in the teacher education program must be accepted into the program during their sophomore year after successfully completing Orientation to Education and Educational Psychology, passing the basic skills portion of state teacher certification exam, obtaining three faculty recommendations, and going through an interview process lead by faculty members of the teacher education program. The teacher education program is approved by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the state's Professional Standards Commission. All program coursework complies with specific coursework requirements of the state and prepares students for certification to teach in public and private schools. The coursework and accompanying mandatory field experiences build upon the college's liberal arts curriculum aimed at developing multicultural and international perspectives. Students complete field experiences in diverse placements throughout public schools in the metropolitan area.

Participants

All seniors enrolled in the early childhood education major were asked to respond to the background questionnaire. These individuals were selected because they are in their final year and have begun planning post graduation teaching options. After the background questionnaires were completed by 12 seniors, eleven students were purposefully selected to participate in individual and group interviews based on their parental income and designation as middle or upper class. The excluded student was a 43 year old continuing education student from the Caribbean. Her parental income was under $30,000 and she currently works as a Head Start teacher. Due to her age, experience not growing up in the United States, and current exposure to high poverty students, I did not select her as a research participant. The group interview format was chosen, in addition to individual interviews, because of the interactive nature of group discussions and spirited dialogue that occurs during most class sessions at this college.

Role of the Researcher

Responding to the challenges of subjectivity, objectivity, and advocacy faced by Black social scientists and historians, Du Bois (1944) stated:

> [social science research] must begin with the near and known as a starting point; and then despite temptation, set goals of dispassionate and ruthless adherence to truth. It can no longer find scientific refuge in detachment from its subject matter; nor just as surely, none in refusal to regard its own personal problems as subjects of scientific investigation (p.6).

As a young child growing up in Southern New Jersey, I was raised in a predominately White upper middle class community. My neighbors included two local school superintendents, fire chief, college president, residential developer as well as prominent lawyers, dentists, doctors, and business owners. My parents, both college-

educated professionals, moved to the town in search of a premier school system, and as a result of wanting a diverse town government, my father became the first elected Black official in the town, serving 3 terms on the local school board. My only interaction with Black children included the few that attended my school, church, Camp Atwater in Massachusetts, and Jack and Jill of America, Incorporated. The lack of faces that looked like me has continued to have a profound impact on the construction of my educational choices, career path, and research interests.

As I reflect on my early education, I have often questioned how my education would have differed if I had attended a predominately Black school or one in a different economic community; if the race or social class of a teacher has an impact on a student's educational process; and, if education has always been impacted by race and social class. I grew up as a minority in a middle class community, then attended college, worked in, and lived in all Black middle class settings. My research interests have mirrored my experiences.

In my opinion, and as argued in the literature, race and social class are normal facets of everyday American life and impact the experiences of all people (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). As stated by Helfrich (1999), emic researchers view phenomena through the eyes of their subjects and do not believe human acts can be separated from their cultural context. Human acts are determined by reasons which are under the control of the person and not by causes that can be studied by natural scientists. Additionally, these reasons must be understood through the eyes of the participants (Helfrich, 1999). As an observer I tend to reconstruct the world of those I observe and research through my lens and explanation.

I am a full time instructor at the site where the research is being conducted. Due to the small size of the teacher education program, the participants in this study have had me as an instructor. Given this relationship and the students' knowledge of my personal and professional background, I believe they viewed me as both an insider and outsider. Johnson-Bailey (2004) stated that when researching within cultural boundaries common bonds of race can construct trust and dialogue, but there should not be an assumption that an insider perspective will lead to total acceptance. There is also a notion amongst qualitative researchers that insiders cannot make valid and critical insights regarding their cultural group (Johnson-Bailey, 2004).

Whether or not I am perceived as an insider, I dealt with issues of subjectivity and voice as a Black researcher studying my community. While I do acknowledge my subjectivity, the use of consistent methodological approaches backed by sound data and maintaining a balance between voice, political agenda, and societal hierarchies, will allow others to embrace my research for the uplift of the Black community (Alridge, 2003; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Data Collection

The nature of this research was both reflective and descriptive. The data sources included background questionnaires and individual and group interviews of then senior early childhood education majors. The data collection and analysis occurred during the Spring 2011 semester. Appendix A outlines a timeline for data collection, which specifically addressed each of the research questions. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from Georgia State University and the study site.

While not part of the original data collection, there was an opportunity to learn the participants' post graduation plans. As a faculty member of the teacher education program, I had the opportunity to learn of the teaching positions the students accepted at the end of their senior year. This information was relevant to the study as it provided insight on the reality of where the preservice teachers were hired compared to their preferred teaching assignment.

Questionnaires

The background questionnaire that senior early childhood education majors were asked to respond to contained questions addressing their personal and education background, household income, parent's education levels, preferred teaching setting, field experience observations, and reasons for choosing a career in teaching (refer to Appendix B). The Informed Consents for Georgia State University and the research site were collected and the questionnaire administered by another faculty member to ensure students did not feel coerced to participate in the study.

Individual Interviews

The individual interview was conducted with each participant and ranged between 30 to 45 minutes in length. The interviews were digitally recorded and solicited information about participants' childhood, extracurricular activities, and their perceptions and past experiences in high poverty communities. The interview recordings were transcribed immediately following the interviews which facilitated the ongoing nature of the data analysis. The individual interviews utilized a semi-structured format that allowed me to follow up on responses given on the background questionnaire (refer to Appendix C).

Group Interview

The group interview lasted for 45 minutes. All seniors who participated in the individual interview took part in the group interview. The purpose of the group interview was to hear the thoughts of all the students in a group setting. Often in a group setting at the research site, the conversation is highly energetic, revealing, and a stimulating precursor to further conversation. The group participants listened to statistics describing high poverty urban schools and were given open-ended questions to discuss. The open-ended questions were intended to capture participants' thoughts regarding their ability to connect with students and parents in high poverty urban schools (refer to Appendix D). Each senior stated her name before answering the question. Like the individual interviews, the group interview was digitally recorded and transcribed. Member checking was employed to ensure that the essence of the participants' views was accurately depicted. Each senior was given a copy of their transcribed individual interview and group interview to review for accuracy. With the exception of one participant who supplied an inaudible word, no changes were made.

Data Management

All of the data collected was stored in a filing cabinet in my locked office. The questionnaires and transcriptions of the interviews were maintained in separate marked envelopes. Data that were collected or analyzed by an electronic means were stored on a password protected computer. The participant consent forms were also kept in a filing cabinet in my locked office. Participants were assigned a pseudonym to maintain their anonymity throughout the study.

Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) described date analysis as working with the data, organizing it, breaking it down into manageable units, coding, synthesizing, and looking for patterns. The data were analyzed on an ongoing basis immediately after they were collected and transcribed. Participant responses from the background questionnaires, individual interviews, and group interviews were coded using constant comparative analysis. Glaser (1965) described the constant comparative method as one that best fits research into social problems and assists in generating theoretical ideas through explicit coding and analytic procedures. The constant comparative model is aimed at generating and suggesting properties and hypotheses about a general phenomenon as the data emerges. Glaser (1978) detailed the following steps for developing theories through the constant comparative method:

1. Collect the data.
2. Search for key topics, reoccurring events, or activities within the data that become categories of focus.
3. Gather data that provides episodes of the categories of focus and look for diversity in the dimensions under the categories or emerging themes.
4. Write about the categories being explored, describe and account for new incidents, and continually search for new incidents or themes within the data.
5. Work with the data and emerging themes to learn basic social processes and relations.
6. Engage in writing the theory focusing on the core categories of themes.

The procedures described by Glaser require an ability to think analytically and see the connections in the data. As connections are made within the data, a coding system evolves. Coding refers to the words, phrases, patterns of behavior, participant's way of thinking, and repeated events that stand out in the questionnaires and interviews (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). The words and phrases of the participants became categories that I manually sorted during and after data collection using both open and axial coding. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggested limiting the number of codes to between 30 and 50 including those which have the most substantiation, as well as topics the researcher would like to explore. Another method of limiting the list of codes is when categories become theoretically saturated which occurs when no new properties, dimensions, or relationships emerge during the analysis (Glaser, 1965). I began my analysis using open coding to draw meaning from the data. As I searched for themes within the data, those themes led to further data analysis. The cyclical process of data collection and analysis assisted me in identifying themes and patterns in the data.

During the entire data collection process, I examined and reflected upon my participants' perceptions. The data analysis included (1) a comprehensive reading of the background questionnaires and interview transcriptions (2) exploring terms and memos written in the margins of field notes, and (3) creating codes and themes that emerged based upon the memos. The original codes from the background questionnaire included: *passion, awareness of terms, awareness of privilege, awareness of socioeconomic status, poverty, presence, good teacher, love, advocates, engage, factors, belief, uneasiness, will, make a difference, give back, connect, cognizant, relate, lived experiences, value, change, terminology, positive, no excuses, care, challenges need, expectations, income, school*

locations, roles, potential and children. Codes from the individual interviews included: *privilege, opportunities, awareness, poverty, terminology, surroundings, school community, residential community, preference, belief, will, preparedness, valuable experiences, instruction, informal knowledge, negative, types of knowledge, status, connect, apprehension, motivation, positive, advocates, needs, innovation, honesty, and skin color*. Codes from the group interview included: *connections, effective, field experience, parents, uneasiness, reserved, strategies, success, income, experiencing, culturally relevant, community, negative, positive, cooperating teacher, student teaching, ideas, and communication*.

I further analyzed my data through the use of axial coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Axial coding reconstructs the data which has been broken into themes for the purpose of understanding the phenomenon under study and the relationships between themes. Through the process of refining and returning to the data, codes were created from repetitive themes that emerged from the participants' dialogue. These codes became apparent as I reviewed, analyzed, and collapsed the data. The codes were related to each other by category and properties which resulted in the formation of axial codes.

Additionally during data collection, I created a coding manual and coding tree. The coding manual served as a depository to collect data and quotes from the background questionnaire, individual interviews, and group interviews. The coding tree refined and depicted the levels of codes reflected in the data. An example of the Level II codes present in the Level I code *Similarity of education background and teacher preference* include: (1) No experiences in high poverty school/communities, want to teach in middle or upper class school; (2) Experience in high poverty schools/communities, want to teach

in high poverty school; and (3) Negative case, does not meet either criteria. The participant quotes that corresponded to the codes and theme were included in each section of the coding table (See Appendix E and F for the Coding Manual and Coding Tree).

The use of open coding to break down and carefully analyze each aspect of the data and the use of axial coding to reconstruct the pieces allowed dominant themes to be identified that addressed the students' understanding of race and social class and themselves as successful teachers in high poverty urban schools.

For this study, I hand-coded the data, and did not use a computer coding program. Glaser (1965) concluded that the constant comparative method conveys credibility because of its analytical nature and the researcher's ability to integrate and make theoretical sense of each comparison. Descriptive statistics were utilized for Likert scales included in the background questionnaire.

Trustworthiness

Golafshani (2003) suggested that qualitative researchers focus on precision, credibility, and transferability to evaluate qualitative findings. These constructs were used provide a framework to evaluation this study opposed to a more traditional manner of representing reliability as the ability to replicate a study and validity as the measure of what the study was intended to measure. Golafshani (2003) also stated, "Reliability and validity are conceptualized as trustworthiness, rigor and quality in qualitative paradigm"

Trustworthiness, or the idea of discovering truth, is defensible and establishes confidence in the findings (Golafshani, 2003). Davies and Dodd (2002) defined a rigorous qualitative study as one that explores subjectivity, reflexivity, and the social

interaction of interviewing. Quality is defined by Eisner (1991) and Stenbacka (2001). A high-quality qualitative study, including this research on preservice teachers and social class, can help us "understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing" (Eisner, 1991, p. 58). Stenbacka (2001) stated that quality in quantitative study has a "purpose of explaining" while quality in qualitative study has the purpose of "generating understanding" (p. 551).

Constructionists, according to Patton (2002), have generated new language and concepts to quality in qualitative research. As reflected in this study an alternative set of criteria for evaluating the quality and credibility of constructionist research includes: acknowledging subjectivity, authenticity, trustworthiness, triangulation, reflexivity, praxis, particularity in preserving the integrity of unique cases, enhancing and deepening understanding, and contributions to the dialogue. Additionally constructionists are "more interested in deeply understanding specific cases within a particular context than in hypothesizing about generalizations applied to human interactions and cultural systems" (Patton, 2002, p.546).

Another way of reflecting on multiple ways of establishing truth in research is through the use of triangulation, Constructionists triangulate data to capture and report multiple perspectives rather than seek a singular truth (Patton, 2002). Triangulation is defined as "a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126). The use of triangulation achieves validity and reliability of qualitative research, eliminates bias, and increases the researcher's truthfulness of a proposition about a social phenomenon (Denzin, 1978). Triangulation

was evidenced in this study by the interconnected data collected from the background questionnaire, individual interviews, and group interview.

Another tenet of trustworthiness is fair representation. To present a fair representation of the viewpoints of the senior early childhood education majors in the teacher education program, member checks were conducted Each participant was given a transcription of her individual interview and group interview to read over for accuracy and to ensure she was represented clearly and fairly. It is essential to ensure the participants' were comfortable with their representation because constructionists "are explicitly informed by attention to praxis and reflexivity, that is understanding how one's own experiences and background affect what one understands and how one acts in the world, including acts of inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p. 546).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In this study I examined the perceptions of Black middle and upper class preservice teachers as it relates to teaching and learning in high poverty urban schools. The guiding research questions for this study were:

1. What are the perceptions of Black middle and upper class preservice teachers regarding teaching and learning in high poverty urban schools?
2. To what extent do Black middle and upper class preservice teachers believe they can be successful teachers in high poverty urban schools?

This chapter will address both research questions which were explored using 11 questionnaire responses, 11 individual interviews and one group interview. The findings from the research questions were based on open and axial coding of themes that emerged during the data analysis. Through the use of the background questionnaire, individual interviews and the group interview, I was able to gain salient components of the preservice teachers' perceptions of teaching and learning in high poverty urban schools.

Background Information

The background questionnaire was given to the college's 12 senior early childhood education preservice teachers after one of their weekly Senior Seminar courses. The questionnaire provided details on the preservice teachers': (a) social economic status; (b) parents' occupations; (c) previously attended schools; (d) unique presence within their school; (e) the type of community they desire to teach in; and (f) whether or not they believe they can be successful teachers in a high poverty urban

school. Although the background questionnaires were given to 12 students, only 11 were used for the purpose of this research.

According to Lacy's (2007) categories of Black social class and as selected by the preservice teachers' (see Table 1), seven listed their joint parental yearly income as over $100,000 (upper class), three listed parental income between $50,000-$99,999 (middle class), and one listed parental income between $30,000 and $49,999 (lower middle class). Though the students self-selected their parent's income, these numbers should be accurate as college students frequently complete financial aid paperwork for college tuition purposes. The majority of the seniors attended suburban elementary, middle, and high schools located in middle or upper income communities. All but one student attended at least two levels of schooling (elementary, middle, or high) in communities of middle or upper income. Of the 11 participants, six included on their background questionnaire that they were one of a few Black students in their classes.

Table 1

Income of Participants

Participant	Reported Income of Parents
Alyssa	$100,000 or above
Bella	$100,00 or above
Carrington	Mother $100,000 or above; Father $100,000 or above
Daphine	Mother $50,000 to $99,999; Father $100,000 or above
Layla	$100,000 or above
Melanie	$100,000 or above
Catherine	$100,000 or above
Simone	Mother $30,000 or below; Father $50,000 to $99,999
Kimberly	$50,000 to $99,999
Destiny	Mother $50,000; Father $30,000 or below
Renee	$30,000 to $49,999

Snapshots

The following snapshots frame the context of the students' economic status, educational background, and lived experiences, as well as include the stories of the research participants. This section provides a detailed overview of each participant and notable responses from their background questionnaire and individual interview.

Carrington

Carrington, a 21 year old from the suburbs of Maryland, wants to enter the teaching profession, "To make a difference in a child's life, as well as to give back." Her

divorced parents are both lawyers who each earn over $100,000 yearly. She describes her childhood as "very comfortable" and one in which she was afforded opportunities such as frequent travel, participating in academic competitions and sports, and having supportive parents who ensured "anything that I needed or anything that could help my education was provided for me." Carrington attended elementary, middle, and high school in a suburban, middle or upper income community. Although Carrington lived in an affluent area, she visited family members and attended church in a high poverty neighborhood. Carrington became cognizant of the role socioeconomic status in children's school experiences when she was in elementary school. She noted that certain students had different clothing, shoes, and personal belongings. Carrington shared that her college experiences altered many of her previous stereotypes of individuals in high poverty communities. She stated that as a child:

> We were just always taught to be aware of our surroundings and when we would visit family and friends oh, this sounds bad, we were told not to sit our bags on the ground or like purses or whatever we brought and to stay where they could see us and remain seated and quiet.

As a result of participating in community service, field experiences, and student teaching in college, Carrington had the opportunity to take part in a community walk and visit community centers. She stated:

> I felt changed. A lot of the times what I saw of high poverty neighborhoods was from TV and movies. Usually when I drive through a high poverty neighborhood I try not to even look out the window. But I saw that they were people just like me. They live in their houses. They have the same things that I had when I was little, maybe not as much but the same basic requirements and needs.

Alyssa

Alyssa, a 21 year old from Maryland, was raised by her mother who has a civilian position with the military and her maternal grandmother. Her father is a physical education teacher. She listed her parental income as over $100,000. Alyssa desires to enter the teaching profession because she loves children and wants to change the educational system. She attended elementary, middle, and high school in a suburban, middle or upper income community. Alyssa was afforded many opportunities because of her parents' income such as Jack and Jill of America, Girl Scouts, an academic team, and book club. Alyssa shared that she did not grow up like the other Black children in her community because the neighborhood children did not participate in activities her mother approved of for her daughter.

Alyssa was raised in an economically and racially diverse neighborhood, but was not aware of the role of socioeconomic status in children's schooling experiences until she took an Urban Advocacy course in the Teacher education program. Alyssa did not have an experience living, working, attending church, or visiting relatives in a high poverty urban community. Alyssa admitted that she can be very oblivious, but since participating in field experiences and community service activities in high poverty urban communities she feels that:

> the children there appreciated my time more than children did in other areas where they had like a surplus of people who always wanted to come and help them. So when I was volunteering with a lot of the kids down here I felt more appreciated like my time wasn't being taken for granted.

Bella

Bella, a 22 year old from Missouri, desires to enter the teaching profession "because there are not a lot people who care about the generation that shapes tomorrow. Teachers are the main people who impact a child's life and I want to be that role model."

Bella attended elementary school located in an urban middle or upper income community, but after her mother married, she attended middle and high school in a suburban middle or upper income community. She felt like the White students treated her like royalty because she was one of a few Black students who took advanced classes in middle and high school.

Bella listed her parent's income as over $100,000 per year. She participated in activities such as sports, Girl Scouts, competitive dance team, Advanced Placement courses, and debutante balls. Her mother is a vice president in marketing for a major phone company with an Associate's degree and her biological father has a high school diploma. Bella did not have an experience living, working attending church, or visiting relatives in a high poverty urban community.

Bella's immediate involvement with individuals in high poverty urban communities did not occur until her collegiate summer experiences with the Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools and mentoring during the academic year. Bella worked as a Freedom School teacher for the past three summers where she taught students who did not have parents actively engaged in their lives, students who were taken from their homes, and those who did not have easy access to food, water, and other basic necessities. Bella stated that after her experiences working in a high poverty urban school:

> It felt great because, you know, these kids a pencil would make them smile, a notebook would make them smile. So anything that we gave them just brightened up their days because they couldn't get it outside of Freedom School. I was glad to provide that for them.

Bella's response about being cognizant of school and socioeconomic status was written as a general reflection, not an example reflecting her own background:

> I believe you become cognizant of the role of socioeconomic status in children's schooling experience the moment you start working with them. If you are a good teacher, you are very observant and would try your hardest to connect with them personally.

Daphine

Daphine, a 21 year old from California, wants to enter the teaching profession because "that's where my passion is. I love children." Daphine was raised by her mother, a United States Postal Service sales representative who earns between $50,000-$99,999 per year. Her father, a retired sheriff, earns over $100,000 per year. Daphine stated that she attended elementary school in an urban, high poverty community, but her middle and high school experiences were in urban, middle or upper income communities. When asked if there was something unique about her schooling, she wrote that her elementary school was Afrocentric, middle school was very diverse, and high school was alternative.

Daphine said she was provided opportunities such as traveling, attending cultural events, and participating in Girl Scouts and sports, which are not experiences every child is given. Daphine explained that her neighborhood has changed throughout the years. It was a middle class neighborhood when she grew up, but has transitioned to low income single parent households over the years. About 80% of the students in her elementary school were on free or reduced price lunch. In addition to experiencing a changing neighborhood while growing up, Daphine attended two churches, visited relatives, and participated in community service projects in high poverty communities. She prefers to partake in community service projects in high poverty areas "just because I know there's a need for it, for help." Daphine first became cognizant of the role socioeconomic status

in children's schooling experiences when she started teaching in a day care center while in college. She did not provide details on this experience.

Layla

Layla, a 21 year old from Georgia desires to enter the teaching profession because she believes "I have a gift from God to make an impact educationally and personally." Layla grew up in Colorado and Georgia, and was enrolled in 20 schools during her formal schooling. Layla's mother and father who together earn over $100,000 are employed as a nurse practitioner and business owner. She attended elementary and high school in a suburban, middle or upper income community, and attended a middle school located in a rural, middle or upper income community. Layla said that her family was one of a few Black families who attended her school. Though Layla grew up in middle or upper income neighborhoods, she desires to teach in a school located in an urban high poverty community serving Black students.

Layla admits that she was given opportunities because of her parent's income and the types of schools she attended. She participated in Theater Club and cheerleading, played the piano, and went to college summer programs. Although she never lived in a high poverty community, Layla's parents made her volunteer in them. She stated her parents made her siblings and her clean up high poverty communities, serve in homeless shelters, and tutor students in underserved areas. In addition, Layla visited family members who resided in high poverty neighborhood when she was growing up. When Layla reflected on these experiences, she said:

> It was an eye opener to let me see that not everyone is as privileged as I have been. And it made me grateful for the things that have been afforded to me because of that. And it also made me want to strive more to help those in any way that I can that aren't as fortunate as myself.

Layla first became aware of socioeconomic status in school when she was in high school. She stated:

> When I was in high school, the Black students did not accept me because I lived in the north part of the town with the White people. They assumed that I was rich. They also assumed I was going to go to a "good" college because my parents could afford it.

Melanie

Melanie, a 23 year old from Georgia, wants to enter the teaching profession to make a difference. She stated that children are her passion and they are our future. Melanie was raised in a single parent household. Her mother, who has an earned PhD, earns over $100,000 per year. Melanie described her elementary and middle schools as being diverse and her high school as majority White. All were located in middle or upper income communities. Melanie noted that in seventh and eighth grades she attended a private school where she was both the only Black student and only female in her grade. Melanie was afforded opportunities such as a children's dance program at a local college, sports, and sorority youth activities because of her mother's income. She also participated in numerous community service projects including a recent trip to Central America.

Although Melanie often says she is a poor, struggling college student, she admits that after her trip to Guatemala:

> I don't know what it means to be poor. Honestly, I don't. My whole life I've been taken care of, not to say that I'm spoiled, but my whole life I've been taken care of. I don't pay for school. My mother pays for everything for me. So when I went there and to see how these kids were hustling to help their parents pay for them, it was kind of an eye opener to know that, you know, there are people out here who don't have what I have and there, it's a lot worse than what I think I have.

Melanie became cognizant of socioeconomic status in schooling when she started college and paid attention to what her classmates were saying and how they reacted to certain issues.

Catherine

Catherine, a 22 year old from Maryland, desires to enter the teaching profession to give students the educational opportunities she was provided as a child. Catherine listed her parents' yearly income at over $100,000. Her mother is an office manager and her father is employed as an IT Specialist. Catherine attended elementary, middle, and high schools in a suburban, middle or upper income community. She indicated that she was one of fewer than 10 Black students in her class, and she attended the same private school from kindergarten to twelfth grade. Catherine was afforded opportunities such as participating in track and field hockey, playing hand bells and clarinet, and being president of the Black Student Union. Catherine felt that she was afforded opportunities based on the school she attended, rather than her parent's income. She did not reside in the neighborhood where her school was located. Catherine was raised in an economically diverse area of Maryland and also had interactions with relatives residing in high poverty neighborhoods. Additionally, Catherine has participated in community service projects and worked in high poverty communities. After her experiences working in these communities, Catherine stated, "I usually feel a lot better about what I was thinking when I went into the neighborhood. Usually my preconceived notions were changed around or altered somewhat."

Catherine became aware of socioeconomic status in schools at a young age:

> I knew from a young age about socioeconomic differences in schooling. I lived in a majority Black neighborhood with a lower socioeconomic status

and attended a majority White school with an upper, upper socioeconomic status.

Simone

Simone, a 21 year old from Georgia, desires to enter the teaching profession because she enjoys preparing students for the future. Simone was raised by her mother after her parents divorced when she was five years old; however her father is still present in her upbringing. Simone indicated on her background questionnaire after much deliberation that mother earns under $30,000 per year, and her father earns between $50,000-99,999 per year. Simone attended elementary school in a setting she described as suburban and middle or upper income. She attended middle and high schools in suburban, middle or upper income communities. Simone participated in extracurricular activities such as Junior Beta Blub, competitive cheerleading, and Elite Sisterhood, a high school sorority, during her formative years.

In another question after describing the location of her church, she said, "Is that a poverty neighborhood? It looks like it." Simone became cognizant of socioeconomic status in middle school. She stated, "I was a cheerleader on a competition squad and those on the team who lived in high income areas had brand new looking books. Mine were semi-brand new looking and those with little money had worn ugly books."

Kimberly

Kimberly, a 21 year old from Georgia, wants to enter the teaching profession because of her love for children and the need for effective public school teachers. She listed her parent's income between $50,000 to $99,999 per year. Kimberly was raised by her mother after her parents divorced when she was 5 years old. She described her elementary school as being urban, with middle to upper income students. Kimberly's

middle and high schools were located in urban, high poverty communities. Kimberly participated in activities such as violin, Beta Club, student government association, and believes she was afforded many opportunities because of the manners and hard work her mother instilled in her and her sister.

Kimberly noticed socioeconomic status in schools when she reached middle school. There was a change in her peers, neighborhood, and attitudes of her teachers. Kimberly attributed the difference to the majority low income status of the students attending her middle school, opposed to the middle and upper income students who attended her elementary school.

Destiny

Destiny, a 23 year old from New York desires to enter the teaching profession to make a change in young children's lives. Destiny describes her community as being "medium income household families." She was unsure of her father's income and listed it as under $30,000 per year. She indicated that her mother, a retired educator, earned between $50,000 and $99,999 per year. Destiny participated in activities such as Girl Scouts, track, and cheerleading.

Destiny attended elementary school in a community she described as urban and diverse. Her middle and high schools were located in a suburban, middle or upper income community. Destiny stated that she was inspired to become an educator while in elementary school. She was often selected by teachers to answer questions about Black topics in class discussions in both middle and high schools because she was one of the few Black students in her classes. During her formative years, Destiny did not live in, visit, or attend church in a high poverty urban area. Although she did not participate in

community service projects in a high poverty urban community until her college matriculation, Destiny said the experiences "make me grateful for the way that I was brought up and the experiences I was able to experience." The lessons learned during her coursework, field experiences, and student teaching have instilled the need for her to be a positive role model in high poverty urban schools. She firmly believes that "you need to challenge students that are in high poverty neighborhoods and not just let them slip through the cracks." Destiny became cognizant of socioeconomic status in schools throughout her middle school years to the present.

Renee

Renee, a 21 year old from New York, desires to enter the teaching profession "to become an advocate for children." Renee lists her parents' joint income between $30,000 and $49,999 per year. Her mother is a Social Work supervisor with a Masters degree, and her father is a truck driver. Although Renee describes herself as living in high poverty as a child, Lacy (2007) suggests that households of $30,000 to $50,000 comprise the Black lower middle class. Renee attended elementary school in a suburban high poverty community. Her middle school was located in a suburban, middle or upper income neighborhood and she attended high school in a suburban high poverty community. Renee noted that her elementary and high schools were extremely diverse and she was probably exposed to every racial group represented in the United States. Renee shared that she grew up in a low-income neighborhood and in a low-income family. She attended middle class schools, which were very diverse, but her family's resources were limited. She shared, "The only extracurricular activities we did in my family were things that had to do with the church, so I was in choir for a long time. And

we did Vacation Bible School and Sunday School but those were the only types of activities that we were allowed to do."

Renee stated that she lived in, visited relatives, attended church, and worked in a high poverty urban community neighborhood. When asked how she felt after her experiences in the high poverty communities and when she first became aware of socioeconomic status affects schooling, Renee responded:

> When I was in the high poverty neighborhood I didn't really think much of it, but when I came to [name of college] I noticed that there was a big difference between how I was raised and the resources that I was afforded and how some of my peers were raised and their resources. And it kind of made me feel a little slighted, you know, how I was raised. But then I realized that my future and how my children are raised are in my hands. So I just took it as a learning experience and I appreciate how I grew up because it makes me appreciate things that are not just handed to me, things that I work for.

Summary

The snapshots of the individual research participants are provided to offer an overview of each participant's personal and educational experiences related to social class. The remaining section of this chapter will synthesize data from the background questionnaire, individual interviews, and group interview in answering the research questions.

Research Question One

What are the perceptions of Black middle and upper class preservice teachers regarding teaching and learning in high poverty urban schools? Data from the background questionnaires, individual interviews, and group interview demonstrated that (a) preservice teachers prefer to teach in communities similar to their own school experiences; (b) the majority of Black middle and upper class preservice teachers believe students from high poverty urban schools can achieve at the same level as students in

middle and upper class schools, but are uncertain of the value their informal knowledge brings to the classroom; and, (c) preservice teachers recognize effective teaching strategies and best practices in classroom instruction.

Theme #1: Preservice teachers prefer to teach in communities similar to their own school experiences

Participant responses on the background questionnaire reflected research by Mabokela and Madsen (2003) that showed cultural identity among teachers adds to the way they are socialized and embraced into an organization. Based on the background questionnaire, all of the participants had at least one stage of their formal schooling in a middle or upper income setting. The research participants were asked to describe the K-12 schools they attended, indicate where they were located, and the type of community the majority of the students resided. Response categories that could be selected included location types of suburban, rural and urban; school demographics of majority Black, majority White, and diverse; and income levels of middle or upper income and high poverty.

Eight of the students attended schools only in middle or upper income communities. Three of the participants, Daphine, Kimberly, and Renee, attended schools located in different social economic communities throughout their elementary, middle, and high school years. Daphine attended elementary school located in a high poverty neighborhood, but a middle and high school located in an urban middle or upper income community. Kimberly attended elementary school in an urban middle or upper income community, but attended middle and high schools in an urban high poverty community. Renee attended elementary and high schools in a suburban high poverty community, but

attended middle school in a suburban middle or upper income middle school. The remaining candidates spent all of their school experiences in middle or upper income schools, with the exception of Destiny, who indicated that she went to a diverse urban elementary school. When asked what was unique about their presence in school, Carrington, Bella, Layla, Melanie, Catherine, and Destiny all responded that they were one of a few Black students in their schools.

Although the majority of the students attended school in a middle or upper income community, they were exposed to high poverty schools during course assignments and activities, field experiences, and student teaching during their matriculation through their major, as well as college-affiliated community service activities in high poverty neighborhoods. The college is located in a high poverty urban community and many of the students participate in mandatory community service activities in the immediate vicinity of the college.

One course activity that participants referenced during their individual interviews was a walking tour of the community surrounding the college that was included in the Advocacy in Urban Schools course. Although the students did not give specific details about their participation in the walk, they included it as one experience in high poverty urban communities that was referenced in the background questionnaire. The walk was completed as a beginning exercise to mentoring elementary students in a high poverty community. The community walk provided the college students a context from which to understand the home lives of the students and influences of their communities. As researched by Ladson-Billings (1995) “by observing the students in their home/community environment, teachers were able to include aspects of the students’

cultural environment in the organization and instruction of the classroom (p. 467). Ladson-Billings (1995) questioned the implications of teacher pedagogy that promote student success while overlooking societal issues that affect classroom learning such as race and class. The Advocacy in Urban Schools course in the teacher education program, the participants' additional courses, field experiences, and student teaching strive to ensure that preservice teachers at this college are knowledgeable and exhibit compassion towards the diversity and complexity of their future students.

While the seniors participated in a multitude of college community service, summer jobs, and major course requirements, nine of the eleven students desire to teach in elementary schools located in communities with the same socioeconomic status as schools they attended in elementary, middle, and high schools. Two students, Carrington and Layla, desired to teach in elementary schools that were the opposite of their own school experiences. Carrington, who attended suburban middle or upper income schools throughout her childhood, indicated a desire to teach in an urban school with a mixture of high poverty and middle or upper income students. Layla, who attended suburban and rural schools located in middle or upper income areas, wants to teach in an urban high poverty elementary school.

In addition to participants being asked about their personal school experiences, the background questionnaire also inquired about their preferred teaching experience. The seniors were asked to describe the K-12 schools they would like to teach in when they graduate from college, indicate where it is located, and the type of community where the majority of the students reside. Response categories that could be selected included location types of suburban, rural and urban; school demographics of majority Black,

majority White, and diverse; and income levels of middle or upper income and high poverty. Table 2 shows the comparison between the preservice teachers' personal elementary school experiences versus their preferred teaching experience as an elementary school teacher.

Table 2

Preservice Teachers' Personal School Experiences and Their Preferred Teaching Experiences

Name	*Personal Experience in Elementary School*	*Preferred Experience as Elementary Teacher*
Carrington	Location: suburban	Location: Urban
	SES: middle or upper	SES: high poverty, middle or upper
Alyssa	Location: suburban	Location: Urban
	SES: middle or upper	SES: middle or upper
Bella	Location: urban	Location: urban
	SES: middle or upper	SES: middle or upper
Daphine	Location: urban	Location: urban
	SES: high poverty	SES: high poverty
Layla	Location: suburban	Location: urban
	SES: middle or upper	SES: high poverty
Melanie	Diverse	Diverse
Catherine	Location: suburban	Location: suburban
	SES: middle or upper	SES: middle or upper
Simone	Location: suburban	Location: Urban
	SES: middle or upper	SES: middle or upper
Kimberly	Location: Urban	Location: Urban
	SES: middle or upper	SES: high poverty
Destiny	Location: urban	Location: urban
	SES: diverse	SES: diverse
Renee	Location: suburban	Location: urban
	SES: high poverty	SES: high poverty

Note. SES = socioeconomic status.

The following quotations from the research participants give a personal framework to their responses on the background questionnaire pertaining to their personal school experiences and where they prefer to teach. Also included is the answer to the background questionnaire item which asks "What schools have you visited for field experience requirements in the teacher education program?" and the individual interview question "Do you have the will to educate all children regardless of their economic status?", which captures the essence of an article by Hilliard (1991) which addresses the same concern.

Carrington. Carrington has completed field experiences and student teaching in five high poverty elementary schools, as well as worked and participated in community service projects in high poverty communities; she is concerned about connecting with her students. Carrington's preference is to teach in an urban community with a mixture of students from high poverty, middle, and upper income households.

Alyssa. Alyssa has the will to educate all children regardless of their socioeconomic status. She stated happily that she loves teaching and will teach "wherever and whenever." Although Alyssa believes she can be a successful teacher in a high poverty urban school, she would like to teach in an elementary school located in an urban middle or upper income neighborhood.

Bella. Though Bella realizes the characteristics of effective and dedicated teachers, she is uncertain if she can be successful as a teacher in a high poverty urban school. Bella stated, "Honestly, I feel the only way I can be successful is if I had total determination and access to many resources. So I guess you would say I am uncertain." On the background survey, Bella noted that she wants to teach in an urban elementary

school with middle or upper income students. She wrote, "I chose these groups because these are the things I am familiar with and what I know how to work with." Although Bella's field experiences have been in high poverty schools, she preferred her student teaching placement which was located in an economically diverse community. The students in her classroom included the principal's son and a district administrator's son. Bella considers herself to be a caring teacher who has the will to educate all children regardless of their economic status. She is adamant that all students have the right to an education in a classroom where there is mutual respect between the teacher and student.

Daphine. In her desire to help make a difference in the life of a child, Daphine is confident that she is prepared and passionate to be a successful teacher not just in a high poverty urban school, but anywhere. Although she feels prepared to teach in any community, Daphine prefers to work in a high poverty community. She stated "If I had to I would teach in…a school setting where the students were upper class, but I would prefer to definitely be in a high poverty or middle class situation." Daphine shared that a lot of people write off children in high poverty areas, but they are just like any other students. "They may not have at-home opportunities, but I feel like if you bring it to the classroom and expose it to them, they'll still be able to have the same academic achievement level that students whose parents can take them out to the various, I guess cultural capital places, you would go to."

Melanie. Melanie has the will to teach all children regardless of their socioeconomic status as long as they are enthusiastic about learning. She indicated that she wanted to teach in a diverse elementary school.

Catherine. Although Catherine desires to teach in an elementary school located in a suburban, diverse, and middle income community, she stated that she does have the will to educate all children regardless of their economic status. She said:

> Originally I wanted to teach students who went to school in circumstances like I was in because I never really had a role model who was African-American, at least not in school. But then someone said to me why would you focus just on one student when you could do the same thing for twenty students.

Simone. When asked about previous experiences with living in poverty, Simone was unsure of a description of poverty. In her answer, she answered the question pertaining to where she would like to teach. She stated,

> I don't know, because I grew up in …, but I lived in a neighborhood with all houses, all the houses were kept up. And, from kindergarten throughout my whole elementary school it was, it was mixed. And then when it got to middle school that's when it stopped being mixed, so I don't really know if it was poverty or not. I want to teach in an elementary school located in a suburban community with students of diverse racial groups, and in a middle or upper income household.

Kimberly. Kimberly desires to teach in a high poverty elementary school located in an urban community with a majority Black student population. She said that her experiences in high poverty schools, including monthly community service projects in high school, have affected her to express her reasons for choosing a career in teaching:

> I guess one of the reasons why I want to be a teacher, because it's sad but at the same time it's like, what can I do to help? I think that the best way to reach the situation is to start with the younger generation. The reason why I want to work with elementary school children is I feel like I can catch them earlier in life. It won't leave; maybe it will break the generational poverty. Give them something to look forward, give them experience outside of the neighborhood. So I mean it's really sad because it's mostly when you think about poverty you really think about African Americans which is really sad because I'm an African American. And I can imagine what other races think when they think about poverty, so I feel like I mean as an African American and as an educator I feel like it's my duty to help, help, help my children. Help the kids that look like me.

Kimberly's passion for teaching was evident throughout the interview. She described teaching and learning in high poverty urban schools as being her motivation for being a teacher. She stated, "The top three things to bring to the classroom are care, love and hope. I think that if you bring hope to a child's life, then the sky is the limit. And I really, really do believe that." Kimberly also shared that she has the will to educate all children regardless of their socioeconomic status, "Most definitely. I have a passion for the urban setting school but, I mean I'm willing to teach everywhere and, and all races, whoever, but I really want to teach you know the students that I feel like I can make, I can really, really help and really, really need my help." Although she mentioned a lack of parent support, resources, and technology, as well as student behavior influenced by outside forces in high poverty schools, Kimberly stated, "You decided to take on teaching especially in the area you decide to teach in," and she is confident that she will make a difference.

Renee. Renee not only believes she can be a successful teacher in a high poverty urban school, but she wants to teach in a similar setting. She feels that she can connect to her students since she spent a lot of her life in a high poverty urban neighborhood. She stated:

> I think that one of my biggest beliefs is that in high poverty neighborhoods and schools teachers have to be the biggest advocates for children. I believe that because most parents are working if not one, two jobs and they're working really late. And they may not have the time to give all of the support that the children need so they need to be able to get it from school. And then also we, high poverty schools might not have the resources that other schools may have, so it just goes to show that teachers really need to be on the ball and pushing the students and letting them know that they can do it no matter what life throws at them.

Layla. All of Layla's field experiences have been in high poverty urban schools. She responded that she has the will to teach students regardless of their socioeconomic status and wants to teach in a high poverty urban school. She stated, "I know I can form lasting and impacting relationships that can have an effect on their education. As long as I put forth the effort and believe, my students will do well."

Destiny. Although she feels prepared to teach in any community, Destiny prefers to work in a high poverty community. She stated "If I had to, I would teach in a school setting where the students were upper class, but I would prefer to definitely be in a high poverty or middle class situation." Destiny shared that a lot of people write off children in high poverty areas, but they are just like any other students. "They may not have at home opportunities, but I feel like if you bring it to the classroom and expose it to them, they'll still be able to have the same academic achievement level that students whose parents can take them out the various, I guess cultural capital places, you would go to."

Theme #2: The majority of Black middle and upper class preservice teachers believe students from high poverty urban schools can achieve at the same level as students in middle and upper class schools, but are uncertain of the value their informal knowledge brings to the classroom

As Table 3 indicates, the research participants have mixed views on whether students living in poverty are capable of attaining the same level of academic achievement as students from middle income or wealthy households. The participants' responses vary on the background questionnaire, individual interview, and group

interview. An explanation for the variation might be attributed to growth during the student teaching process or giving me the answer they assume I want to hear during the interview. An example of this variation occurred with Carrington. She asked, on a few occasions, if I would be upset with her responses and if she should answer truthfully. I reassured her that the answers were confidential and that I wanted her honest feedback on her perceptions of teaching in high poverty urban schools. Another account of the variation may be the participants' growth during their student teaching assignments. The background questionnaires were completed about three weeks after the participants began student teaching. The individual interviews were completed during the middle of their student teaching when they had assumed teaching responsibilities for the entire school day, and the group interview occurred the evening before their final day of student teaching.

On the background questionnaire, Alyssa, Layla, Melanie, Kimberly, and Renee responded that they strongly agreed that students living in poverty are as capable of attaining the same level of academic achievement as students from middle income or wealthy households. These five students who responded "strongly agree" had personal experiences attending school, residing in, visiting family members, or participating in community service activity in high poverty urban areas as a child. Renee, Layla and Kimberly, who all responded "strongly agree" desire to teach in a high poverty urban area. The six students (Daphine, Carrington, Bella, Catherine, Simone, and Destiny) who responded "agree" have varied experiences in high poverty urban schools, and the majority did not indicate a desire to teach in a high poverty urban school. Daphine, who

wants to teach in a high poverty school and Carrington, who wants to teach in a school with a mixture of high poverty, middle and upper income students, responded “agree.”

Table 3

Perceptions of Preservice Teachers

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Students living in poverty are capable of attaining the same level of academic achievement as students from middle income or wealthy households.	*45%* *Alyssa* *Layla* *Melanie* *Kimberly* *Renee*	*55%* *Daphine* *Carrington* *Bella* *Catherine* *Simone* *Destiny*	*0%*	*0%*
Students from middle income or wealthy households bring valuable out-of-school experiences and informal knowledge to the teaching and learning process.	*36%* *Carrington* *Destiny* *Alyssa* *Catherine*	*64%* *Daphine* *Layla* *Kimberly* *Melanie* *Bella* *Simone* *Renee*	*0%*	*0%*
Students living in poverty bring valuable out-of-school experiences and informal knowledge to the teaching and learning process.	*27.3%* *Daphine* *Alyssa* *Destiny*	*45.4%* *Layla* *Melanie* *Simone* *Kimberly* *Renee*	*27.3%* *Carrington* *Bella* *Catherine*	*0%*
A good teacher exhibits a warm, caring, and positive disposition regardless of a student’s race, class, gender, religion, language, culture, sexual orientation, and all other characteristics.	*100%*	*0%*	*0%*	*0%*

On the background questionnaire, when asked if students from middle income or wealthy households bring valuable out-of-school experiences and informal knowledge to

the teaching and learning process, four seniors (Carrington, Destiny, Alyssa, and Catherine) responded “strongly agree” and seven seniors (Daphine, Layla, Kimberly, Melanie, Bella, Simone, and Renee) responded “agree.”

When asked if students living in poverty bring valuable out-of-school experiences and informal knowledge to the teaching and learning process, three seniors (Daphine, Alyssa, and Destiny) responded “strongly agree,” five seniors (Layla, Melanie, Simone, Kimberly, and Renee) responded “agree,” and Carrington, Bella and Catherine responded “disagree.” Carrington indicated a desire to teach in an elementary school that was comprised of high poverty, middle and upper income students. Though Carrington’s answers seem contradictory, they could reflect her status as being the most affluent of the research group. It would be difficult for a teacher to not believe in the learning potential of her students. Conversely, during the individual interview, Carrington disagreed with the notion that low income and minority students do not bring valuable out of school experiences and informal knowledge to the teaching and learning process. She stated:

> I believe that they do bring knowledge. It just may be a different type of knowledge. I’ve seen students where maybe I would relate a visit going to the zoo with talking about something. They may not relate it going to the zoo. They may say, you know, I’ve seen the dog catcher come run and catch the dogs and it may be a different type of experience but it’s still relative to the learning so I disagree. I believe that every student has their own experiences that they can bring to the table. It may just not be what society deems a good experience.

I am not sure if Carrington’s answer reflects growth from her response on the background questionnaire or if she responded in the manner I, her former instructor, would want her to respond to a question about teaching and learning in a high poverty urban school. My students are aware that I am passionate about teaching in urban schools; therefore her answer may reflect that knowledge. Bella and Catherine responded

"disagree" to the statement "Students living in poverty bring valuable out-of-school experiences and informal knowledge to the teaching and learning process."

On the background questionnaire, the participants were asked if their cultural background and lived experiences shaped how they viewed themselves and others, as well as impacted who they were as teachers. Only two participants, Bella and Melanie, responded "agree." All of the other participants selected "strongly agree."

Theme #3: Recognition of effective teaching strategies and best practices

The background questionnaire and individual interviews shed light on the realization that the seniors have a broad range of effective teaching strategies and best practices that are beneficial in any classroom setting. On the background questionnaire all of the research participants strongly agreed that a good teacher exhibits a warm, caring, and positive disposition regardless of a student's race, class, gender, religion, language, culture, sexual orientation, and all other characteristics. Not only are they grounded in the belief that teachers are essential to their students' success, the participants have an engrained pedagogy of student-centered instruction and the impact of out of school experiences and informal knowledge on the teaching and learning process.

During the individual interview, all participants were unwavering in their support for student-centered instruction and the de-emphasis on teacher centered instruction and seatwork in any school regardless of the socioeconomic background of the students. Participants stressed the significance of using manipulatives during classroom instruction and allowing students to share informal knowledge with their classmates. Carrington stated, "I don't believe in students walking down the hallway with their hands behind

their back or sitting at their seat doing work all day long. I feel that they need to get up and interact with each other. It's part of learning and it's a part of life." Layla, Simone, Daphine and Catherine stated that classroom instruction should be a balance between student-centered and teacher-centered instruction and tailored to meet the needs of individual students. Layla stated, "I think first the teacher needs to get to know her students and know what works best for them and then use that to structure the way, how her lessons and her classroom is run." Melanie spoke about the value of using tangible manipulatives to enhance classroom instruction. Catherine said "I think a combination of those things or at least direct instruction with more hands on interactive work is better for our students in lower income situations."

Kimberly and Renee mentioned the relationship between types of instruction and behavior challenges in high poverty classrooms. Kimberly's response was:

> I disagree with that statement because I feel like that's a cop-out because these children are coming from high poverty areas, I feel like sometimes people think that they automatically have behavior issues so, we don't want them to move around the class too much because so and so may get into it with so and so. I feel like you have to bring hope to classrooms, and that's why I said hope before because if I'm going into the classroom with this mindset, then my students are going to feed off of that and they're going to give me back what I give them. So why would I have them sit, I don't want to listen to someone sit down and talk to me from 8:00 to 2:30. I want them to move around, I want the students to be, they're still children, they're in elementary school so you, this is not a college setting.

Renee said,

> I disagree; I think some educators say that because they don't know how to necessarily deal with the behaviors of low-income students. The behaviors that they pick up from home and bring into school, so they want to have them sit in their desk all day. I think that learning for these students need to be, needs to be interactive because they might not be being exposed to certain things outside of a classroom. So that's our opportunity as educators to expose them to as much as possible. And

> doing seatwork and direct instruction and having a teacher centered classroom is not the way to go about that.

Three shared beliefs emerged in response to the individual interview request to share a belief about teaching and learning in a high poverty school. The beliefs were that everyone can learn, teachers must have a passion for teaching, and teachers are responsible for engaging students.

Everyone can learn. Five of the seniors (Carrington, Alyssa, Daphine, Layla, and Catherine) stressed the belief that all children can learn. Carrington stated that all students have the same potential and access to qualified teachers, although students in high poverty urban schools may not have the same advantages and resources as their middle and upper class peers. Alyssa, Daphine, Layla, and Catherine also shared Carrington's sentiments and responded that all students can learn.

When asked to share a belief about teaching and learning in high poverty urban schools, Alyssa stated:

> I honestly believe that everybody can learn like regardless of their, you know, socio-economic status or whatever is going on at home. One belief that I have adopted from different schools that I have gotten to visit and interview with is called "there's no excuses." And it's just that it pushes the idea that no matter what's going on, like you as an individual, you can still learn. So, you know all the things that are going on at home, yes, they may factor how you learn, but they don't prevent you from learning.

Passion. During the individual interviews, the participants shared the belief that teachers must have a passion for teaching in urban areas. Bella stated, "I believe that those who want to teach in high poverty schools and neighborhoods have to really have a heart and care for every individual that they come across because a lot of these children don't get that love and support outside of the teachers or the people working with them in the classrooms." Kimberly expressed the importance of teachers displaying

characteristics of “care, love, and hope,” and Renee spoke of the critical need for teachers to be advocates for their students. Simone and Layla also suggested that good teachers transmit knowledge to their students by showing care.

Engagement. The last belief that emerged from the responses pertaining to teaching and learning in high poverty schools is the teachers’ responsibility for engaging students. The seniors shared statements on the individual interviews such as the “sky is the limit”, the need to “challenge students,” “expect a lot,” of your students, accept “no excuses,” “break down barriers,” “engage and push students,” to describe and summarize their thoughts of teaching in high poverty urban schools. It seems that the students are aware that challenges exist in high poverty urban communities and recognize that all students can learn if teachers exhibit care and set high standards. While the students grasp the concepts that are essential to ensuring academic success for students in high poverty urban schools, it is not evident that all have the intrinsic will described by Hilliard (1991) to make it a reality. The data shows that not all of the preservice teachers are ready and willing to teach in high poverty urban areas and as demonstrated in their snapshots, a few of the students openly shared their apprehensions about teaching in high poverty urban areas.

Research Question Two

To what extent do Black middle and upper class preservice teachers believe they can be successful teachers in high poverty urban schools? The answer to this question was constructed from each participant’s belief system which included her personal, educational, and professional framework. Table 4 contains the responses to the background questionnaire items: “Do you believe you can be a successful teacher in a

high poverty urban school?" and "Describe the elementary school you would like to teach in when you graduate from college?"

The answers in Table 4 reveal more than just the participants' responses. They reveal the passion, purpose, and indifference felt about teaching in high poverty urban schools, and perhaps which students should not choose teaching in high poverty urban schools as an occupation. As noted in the table, eight of the participants believe they can be successful teachers in high poverty urban schools. Their answers also speak to the degree in which they aspire to work in high poverty urban schools. The passion and heart for teaching in a high poverty urban school speaks is evident in the majority of the positive responses, however, Simone's response is written in the third person and is not necessarily relatable to her.

Table 4

Beliefs and Preference of Preservice Teachers

Do you believe you can be a successful teacher in a high poverty urban school?	*Describe the elementary school you would like to teach in when you graduate from college.*
"Yes, I believe that God has really given me a gift to relate to students in high poverty urban schools. I know I can form lasting and impacting relationships that can have an effect on their education. As long as I put forth the effort and believe, my students will do well." – Layla	Location: Urban SES: high poverty
"Yes, I do because I grew up in a high poverty environment and spent a lot of time in an urban area (with family). So I feel like I can connect with my students." – Renee	Location: Urban SES: high poverty
"I do believe I can be a successful teacher in a high poverty urban school because I have a great deal of patience. I also enjoy breaking down concepts which may be effective in the urban school setting." – Destiny	Location: Urban SES: diverse
"Yes, children are children. As a teacher I have to understand the basic needs of a child. I want to teach despite the challenges I may face in a high poverty urban school. My goal is to become an effective teacher. Once this takes place, success will follow." – Kimberly	Location: Urban SES: high poverty
"I think that any teacher can be successful as long as they have high expectations and are willing to work." – Simone	Location: Suburban SES: middle to upper income
"Honestly, I feel the only way I can be successful is if I had total determination and access to many resources. So I guess you would say I am uncertain." - Bella	Location: Urban SES: middle to upper income
"Yes, I do. Being able to relate to students is a good way to help them understand. If you show your students that you believe in them, they will take pride and believe in themselves." - Melanie	Diverse
"Yes, being successful is something that is subjective and set by your own standards. I will be if I strive to be successful." – Alyssa	Location: Urban SES: middle to upper income

"Yes, I feel prepared and passionate that I can be successful anywhere." - Daphine	Location: Urban SES: middle or upper income
"I'm not sure. My experiences make me nervous about my abilities to relate and convey material." - Catherine	Location: suburban SES: middle or upper income
"I'm uncertain. I believe in myself and my teaching practices. However, I'm still trying to learn how to connect with my students." – Carrington	Location: Urban SES: "in between" high poverty, middle and upper

Three of the participants indicated a sense of uncertainty pertaining to their successful teaching in high poverty urban schools. Each of the three respondents, Catherine, Carrington, and Bella attended schools located in suburban middle or income areas during their formal schooling. Bella, who completed her field experiences at high poverty urban schools, completed her student teaching in an economically diverse elementary school. In addition to being uncertain about their success in high poverty urban schools, none of the three responded that they wanted to teach in an environment that was exclusive to a high poverty urban community.

The group interview provided a chance for the seniors to assemble and hear each other's views on connecting with students and parents in high poverty schools. At the beginning of the group interview, participants were provided with examples and statistics on the plight of Black urban children in today's schools and asked the following questions:

1. Do you think you will be able to connect with students in a high poverty urban school?
2. What strategies would you use to connect with students in a high poverty urban school?

3. Do you think you will be able to connect to the parents of your students in a high poverty urban school?
4. What strategies would you use to connect to the parents of your students in a high poverty urban school?

There were commonalities in the themes that emerged from the answers to both research questions which demonstrate the interrelatedness of the questions. The second research question also pertained to teacher preference, uncertainty, and best practices in classroom instruction.

Theme #1: Black middle and upper class preservice teachers have mixed feelings regarding their ability to connect with students and parents in high poverty urban schools

When the group interview began, participants discussed their personal backgrounds prior to attending college. While I have had the opportunity to teach this group and witness their lively debates on various education topics, they were surprisingly quiet and visibly moved by their classmates' experiences. It appeared to be the first time that the students "heard" each other beyond superficial classroom conversation and banter. This was especially apparent when participants were listening to each other describe an upbringing that did not mirror their own. The first question "Do you think you will be able to connect with students in a high poverty urban school" gave the participants the opportunity to not only answer the question, but also give personal background knowledge to support their answers. It is important to note that while the Black middle and upper class preservice teachers possess the skills and dispositions to connect with students and parents in high poverty urban schools, they have mixed feelings about the *ability* to connect with students and parents in high poverty urban schools.

For example, Daphine felt that she will be able to connect from students in a high poverty school because she has lived in a high poverty area. Carrington stated that through her student teaching, she found that connections "don't have to just be made off of socioeconomic background decisions or choices, or even outcomes that you've had in your life. They can be based off of things that you may have in common, things that you like, things that you are interested in." Kimberly reflected that "students are students and children are children." Layla added:

> The area in which a school is located does not determine one's ability to connect. In order to form a genuine relationship, you must show that you care and you must prove yourself trustworthy. There should not be any difference in one's ability to connect with students who attend schools in high poverty areas and with students who attend schools in affluent suburban areas.

Alyssa added a similar sentiment:

> I think while sharing similar backgrounds with students helps, it's not the determining factor in one's ability to connect with them. I'm great at building relationships with people and I think once you students realize you care about them, they are more willing to connect with them.

The third question, "Do you think you will be able to connect to the parents of your students in a high poverty urban school," also elicited themes associated with connections. Before responding, Carrington asked if I wanted her truthful answer. After I responded yes, she said:

> I would just like to say that that's one of my biggest issues is that I feel like because parents look at me and they hear that my voice doesn't sound like theirs or I may not dress like them that I automatically think that I'm above them, that I know more about their child. And it really hurts sometimes because it's kind of like, "I'm coming to you for help. I need your help. We have to do this together. We have to work together. We have to form a connection so that we can help your child move further." And they just want to stop it at the ground. And I haven't had it happen very much at my student teaching. Mainly mostly because they don't…they know that I'm not the main teacher. But I'm really worried about it next year because the looks that I get from parents in the school,

> the sideways glances, all that type of stuff has already happened. And I'm really worried about being able to make a connection. To know that I can talk to parents about what's happening in the classroom.

As soon as Carrington completed her thoughts, Bella agreed with Carrington's concerns, but more along the lines of age, not socioeconomic status. Bella shared:

> I can say that it's something I worry about as well because I've had parents come to me and say, "You just look so young, like, I can't believe you're teaching." Even though they're not much older than I am half the time. But, so I think it's kind of hard because sometimes they still look at me as a child when technically I would be the teacher in the situation. So I'm not saying I won't be able to connect. It would definitely just be a challenge.

Catherine, who also spoke on being nervous about connecting with parents because of her age, stated "As nervous as I am about connecting with parents and them not understanding where I'm coming from or seeing me as an actual point of authority, I think I have learned a lot from my student teaching teacher who calls parents throughout the day." During Carrington, Bella, and Catherine's sharing, the other participants were quiet. This was one of those moments during the group interview that the participants listened to each other and "heard" truthful insecurities that each may have about entering the teaching field.

Melanie commented on the lack of parental engagement during her student teaching experience. She said:

> Even though we have a common interest, which is their child, it's hard to connect with them when they don't make the initiative to come meet me or if I call they don't answer the phone, you know what I mean? So how am I supposed to connect with someone if I don't ever see them?

Renee, who was initially hesitant, contributed to the conversation on connecting with parents:

> At first I was going say I don't think that it's necessary that I would connect with them, but that I would know how to deal with them. But that's not true. As I think about it, I feel like I would be able to connect

> with my student's parents because I've seen where they are and I understand where they're coming from. And once I communicate that to them and, you know, "I understand that you work two jobs. And I understand that you may be doing this, you may be doing that." You know, I've since seen that and I've been there before. I feel like it would open up a door for them to be, like, "Okay, well, she's not judging me. So let me try to do what I can to help my student…to help my child."

Kimberly summarized her classmates' comments and gave a concluding statement to question three:

> I think that I will be able to connect with the parents. It is a serious situation but I feel like there's already a connection and the common denominator is the student. You have their best interest at heart. And hopefully the parent has the child's best interest at heart. So with that being said, before a word's even spoken you can have your misconceptions before we talk but when we talk I need you to know that I'm here for your child. I'm not here for you, whether you like me or not, that's fine. But at the end of the day I'm gonna give you respect. That's all I need from you.

Alyssa, Layla, and Simone also stated that they would be able to connect with parents of their students because as Alyssa shared, "Parents will understand that I am there for not only their child, but for them as well. One's duty of teaching goes beyond the classroom in order to get the most significant and impactful results."

Another important topic within the theme of connections came from the individual interview centered on the question, "Some people believe that Black middle and upper class preservice teachers are prepared to teach in high poverty urban schools because they most likely share the same skin color as their students. Do you agree or disagree and why?" I think this question is especially important because the answers give insights as to why the research participants may not feel comfortable teaching in a high poverty urban elementary school. The majority of the research participants did not agree that Black middle and upper preservice teachers are prepared to teach in high poverty urban schools because they most likely share the same skin color as their students. Seven

participants disagreed; while the other four gave answers supporting both a negative and positive response (see Table 5).

Table 5

Are Black middle and upper class preservice teachers prepared to teach in high-poverty urban schools because they most likely share the same skin color as their students?

Yes	No	More than one answer
	Renee	*Alyssa*
	Destiny	*Daphine*
	Carrington	*Bella*
	Catherine	*Melanie*
	Simone	
	Kimberly	
	Layla	

Renee:

If you haven't been exposed to what the children are exposed to in high poverty neighborhoods you're not going to understand where they're coming from. Just having the same skin color as someone doesn't make you connected with them at all. And I feel like if you've never been in a high poverty neighborhood, never volunteered there, never worked there, then you're not, you're most likely not going to understand your students. And not have the right resources to help them get to where they need to be.

Destiny:

Skin color doesn't make you, doesn't allow you to be relatable to someone else. To a certain extent it does, but that's not the whole spectrum. I think that in order to be relatable to a student regardless if they're Black or whatever skin color they are, you need to put yourself in their shoes and try to imagine what they're experiencing and kind of humble yourself so that you can meet them where they are and get them to the next level.

Carrington:

No. I know that there's a teacher that is in fourth grade and she is White and she is probably from the same type of neighborhood that I am from. I have spoken to her about her past and I think that we both can bring the same educational resources, educational ideas to the team, to the table. Some of the slang that I

don't understand she doesn't understand either. It's not the way that I grew up. It's not the way that she grew up. But we're both here as teachers, not as friends, not as someone to relate to from outside of school. We're just both here to teach. So I don't think that that has anything to do with it.

Catherine:

Socioeconomic status can change behavior and attitudes very much so and being both…having…being black and then teaching people who are black who might be from a different socioeconomic status is…they're two different worlds.

Simone:

Well I don't think it's at every school, because I know some people at [name of college/university] which is a majority White institution and they don't do as much as we do as far as it concerns low economic status students or Black students.

Kimberly:

I think it's just based on the experience of the person. Some people, coming from middle class families and situations may not be able to handle high poverty situations because it may not be something that they are used to, or they can relate to.

Layla:

I would have to say I don't agree just because you are the same skin color as someone does not mean that you go through the same things as a whole. I feel like your exposure to both sides of the spectrum will enable you to be able to teach students who are in high poverty areas. But just to say that you all are the same skin color will afford you to teach them and be effective is not true.

Alyssa:

For the most part I agree because I know firsthand when I've had Black teachers I'm more likely to connect with them. But then at the same time I feel just because your skin color is the same doesn't mean you have shared the same experiences. So it's not always like a one hundred percent kind of thing. But I think for the most part it does have an impact.

Daphine:

Oh, I definitely feel like they may have that one connection, we're both African American so they can talk about I guess the African American cultural aspect.

> But at the same time I feel like you never know like what a child has to go through unless you were in that same position. Like even myself I thought you know, I may be able to connect with students because I grew up in the same type of area as them. But my student teaching has shown me that it's things that these kids have to deal with that you can never be on their level. I feel like the fact that I'm in college puts me at a different point in, like a point or different view from what a lot of these students deal with. So I feel like instead of saying I'm the same level as them, it's like I can tell them, like I was where you were and this is what I did to you know, better my situation. Or to give them the tools that they need to better their situations. I wouldn't say that I was on the same level as them because I just feel they deal with different things and deal with things that I didn't have to deal with just because I was afforded different opportunities than them. But I can see how people could get, draw that conclusion.
>
> **Bella:**
>
> I agree because from my experience the people who I know in education now have been Black middle and higher income. And they love working with urban and, you know, at risk children or in high poverty areas, just because they can give back. They see what these children don't have that they did have. I also disagree because not everybody can teach, so not everybody has that teaching quality to be an effective teacher especially working with students at risk.
>
> **Melanie:**
>
> I don't know. A little of both. I feel like as an African-American I feel like I could give back to my community. I could show my kids that I, too, came from a low income area but I graduated, well I will be graduating from college and you can do it too. So it's not, I guess it's nice for kids to see someone that looks like them and they've been successful and maybe they will be encouraged and want to do the same.

Theme #2: Preparation from the teacher education program positively impacted the preservice teachers' view of high poverty urban schools

Although not an expected theme because the effectiveness of the teacher preparation program was not included in the scope of this study, students discussed how their courses, activities, field experiences, and student teaching in the teacher education program positively impacted their view of high poverty urban schools. Daphine, Kimberly, and Destiny made reference to working with students in high poverty urban

schools during their enrollment in the program when answering the question about connecting with students in high poverty urban schools.

When Daphine answered the question about connecting to students in high poverty urban schools she used her personal background and participation in the teacher education program in her response. She said, “Going through the teacher education program, we are taught to have an urban education lens, so I've been very prepared through the program to do so.”

Destiny stated, “I think that I'll be able to connect with students in a high poverty urban school setting because we've been prepared throughout our matriculation. Students are students regardless of their socioeconomic status. You can find some way to connect with them.” Similarly, Kimberly shared, “Coming from this program, we're taught to work with children in high poverty neighborhoods. And I think that we'll be able to connect with them just fine.”

Theme #3: Recognition of effective teaching strategies and best practices

As demonstrated in the background questionnaire, individual interviews, and the group interview, the preservice teachers have a firm understanding that effective teachers must connect with students and parents. All of their responses seem to indicate they understand this principle and intend to use it in their classrooms. In reaction to “What strategies would you use to connect with students in a high poverty urban school?” Renee stated:

> A really good strategy would be to read up on a lot of the teachers who have come from neighborhoods other than these schools and hear their success stories. I read a book about a teacher in California who didn't know what he was dealing with and yet he created his own reading program and now all of the students in that school and in that neighborhood want to come to his class.

Carrington and Catherine discussed the need to connect with students as a strategy for reaching them academically. Carrington said:

> By seeing and experiencing the community that your students come from, you can see what type of backgrounds they are coming from, see the type of needs that they have in their neighborhoods, and you can try to understand or comprehend the differences that you will see between yourself and the students. I was just speaking to a couple teachers about students not having backpacks. They don't even have paper. So when they come to school and they are angry and they don't seem like they want to be there, as opposed to when I came to school and I was happy and excited to come to school, it can help you see why some of those differences may arise.

Catherine shared,

> I think a lot of the same strategies apply regardless of if it's a high poverty area or a high income area. You have to spend time and go out of your way to make time to get to know your students. So if that means taking a few days when they first start in the school year to figure out what they are interested in, what gets them excited. And then using those things, that information that they tell you throughout the school year to get them involved.

In addition to connecting with students, the participants also discussed strategies for connecting with parents. Daphine and Melanie spoke of methods used by their cooperating teachers when communicating with parents. Daphine's teacher starts the school year off with three positive phone calls before calling for disciplinary reasons. Her cooperating teacher found that parents are more willing to become engaged when they see that the teacher wants to help their child. Daphine said that parents are "more willing to talk to you about different needs or different things that are going on that may affect the student's learning inside and outside the classroom." Correspondingly, Melanie said that her cooperating teacher shared positives, then concerns, followed by positives within the same phone conversation.

Other strategies that were shared by participants included making weekly phone calls, sending weekly memos, newsletters, and emails, sponsoring parent programs such as “Parent University,” “Fluency Fiesta,” “Math Night,” “Muffins for Mom,” and “Donuts for Dads,” and offering incentives for students to get their parents involved. Simone offered the following strategies:

> I would try to get to know them on a personal level as well, I would also make sure to talk to them in a language that is not threatening, and does not make them feel as if they are being talked down to. I would also ask them for suggestions on what they would like me to do to help their children learn so that they feel as if they are a part of their child’s learning process.

Conclusions

The 11 seniors who participated in this research study offered a variety of personal experiences and diverse perspectives on teaching. They each brought a different viewpoint to the teacher education program and seemed to gain a different understanding and experience from their field experiences and student teaching assignments. Although the majority of the students visited the same schools, or those situated in similar socioeconomic status, the critical lens by which they viewed their experience was vastly different.

For example, Renee, Kimberly, and Daphine who grew up or attended schools in a lower middle class community, voiced commitment and passion for educating students in high poverty schools. Catherine, Alyssa, Simone, Bella, Destiny, and Melanie, who attended schools in middle or upper income communities, intend to return to schools that were similar in socioeconomic status to the schools they attended as elementary, middle, and high school students. Layla and Carrington, who attended middle or upper class

schools, seemed open to teaching students in a high poverty school, but for Carrington, there needed to be a diverse mixture of incomes in her desired school.

It would be interesting to follow these 11 students into their first year of teaching at their respective schools. I found through my interaction with the young women that they offered an untapped potential as described by Hilliard (1991). They give the impression to have the intrinsic will to make a difference in elementary school students' lives, but some seem unsure of themselves as successful teachers.

Hilliard (2006) summarizes the hopes, dreams, and untapped potential of new teachers in a remarkable manner:

> Being a teacher is simply one of the greatest things in the world! Is it a job? Is its purpose to prepare students for the world of work? Yes and yes, but those things are minimal. It matters greatly how teachers think about who they are, who children are, and why they are here. It is my fondest hope that those who intend to enter teaching will learn early about its enormous power, its awesome rewards, its value to students and their families, and its personal fulfillment for teachers (p.1).

The 11 seniors who participated in this study have informed education research as it relates to preservice teachers from Black middle and upper class communities. It can be concluded that personal and educational backgrounds are significant forces in the development of preservice teachers. Just as White preservice teachers enter teacher education programs with their own set of biases based upon their personal context, Black middle and upper class preservice teachers are equally as likely to be shaped by their personal and educational experiences which will have an impact on their future aspirations and ultimately affect the young children whose lives they will transform.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of Black middle and upper class preservice teachers as they relate to teaching and learning in high poverty urban schools. My discussion includes the following conclusions: (a) Black middle and upper class preservice teachers prefer to teach in communities similar to their own school experiences; (b) the majority of Black middle and upper class preservice teachers believe students from high poverty urban schools can achieve at the same level as students in middle and upper class schools, but are uncertain of the value of informal knowledge that children bring to the classroom; and (c) Black middle and upper class preservice teachers recognize effective teaching strategies and best practices in classroom instruction. The chapter also provides discussion on the limitations of the research, implications, future research, and a summary.

Teacher Preferences for Black Middle and Upper Class Preservice Teachers

Data from this research study has shown that the senior early childhood education preservice teachers who were raised in middle or upper class communities: (a) had little or no exposure to family members residing in high poverty urban areas; (b) had little or no experience participating in community service activities in a high poverty urban area; and, (c) were apprehensive about teaching in a high poverty urban school. Carrington, Catherine, and Bella, who were raised in middle or upper class communities and schools, explicitly stated their reservations of teaching in a high poverty urban community. Alyssa, Melanie, Simone, and Destiny responded positively that they believed they could teach in a high poverty urban school, but none chose it as an option when asked where

they desired to teach. The four remaining students (Layla, Renee, Daphine, and Kimberly) had previous experiences in high poverty urban communities through school attendance, visiting family, or participating in community service activities and indicated a desire to teach in a high poverty urban school. As outlined by Bourdieu (1998) habitus is a system of dispositions and perceptions that are constructed over time and shape how individuals make sense of and act on a particular field. Habitus organizes the way individuals perceive objects, events, and actions, it systematizes the social world for individuals, and it guides how individuals act in their world (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Cannata, 2010).

Correspondingly, as stated by Ladson-Billings (1995) culturally relevant teachers are grounded in their conceptions of self and others. Embedded in the construct of Conceptions of Self and Others is the notion that culturally relevant teachers see themselves as members of the community who are giving back to the community (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The questions that arise as a result of analyzing the student responses are: what represents the Black middle and upper class preservice teachers' community and how is their identity shaped?

Lacy (2002), studying middle class Black families in Washington, DC, found that middle class Black parents grounded their children's identity as Black individuals and simultaneously immersed them into middle class White culture. The families included in Lacy's research relied on other Black middle class families, and organizations such as Jack and Jill of America and faith-based organizations to provide social interactions and Black spaces for their children to "learn what it means to be black" (p. 226). Learning what it means to be Black and operating in the White world is also what was popularly

coined by Du Bois (1903) as “double consciousness,” where Black identity is created by external and internal determinants.

The hesitations of the Black middle and upper class preservice teachers in desiring to teach in high poverty urban schools are related to studies by Cannata (2010) which indicated that teachers’ perceptions of students are filtered through their own social and cultural understandings. Teachers tend to characterize school success and failure according to their students’ home environment or social background. Many teachers tend to favor more affluent, less diverse schools located close to where they grew up for their first teaching assignment. Teachers’ preferences for working with students from a particular racial background depend on their own background. Given the double consciousness (Black and middle/upper class) of the preservice teachers in this study, it is a difficult to ascertain how they would be included in the findings of Cannata’s study.

Teacher Perceptions about Teaching and Learning in High Poverty Urban Schools

Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested that culturally relevant teachers who are grounded in their Conceptions of Self and Others hold high expectations for all students and believe all students are capable of achieving academic excellence. On the background questionnaire, the preservice teachers responded favorably to the question “Students living in poverty are capable of attaining the same level of academic achievement as students from middle income or wealthy households.” Five students selected “strongly agree” and 6 students selected “agree.” The positive responses to this question are in agreement with Ladson-Billings’ theory of culturally relevant teaching. Although there is variation in the degree to which they believe in the ability of students in

high poverty urban schools, there seems to be a consensus among the preservice teachers that all students are capable of achieving academic excellence. Students who selected "agree" (Daphine, Carrington, Bella, Catherine, Simone, and Destiny) have varied experiences with students in high poverty urban schools and only Carrington and Daphine indicated a desire to work in a high poverty school. The preservice teachers who selected 'strongly agree" either want to teach in a high poverty school or have past experiences in high poverty urban communities. These responses demonstrate positive expectations, but it is not quantifiable to say they all have *high* expectations unless "strongly agree" is representative of high expectations and "agree" is representative of average expectations.

There was more variation on the background questionnaire item that asked if students from high poverty urban schools brought valuable out-of-school experiences and informal knowledge to the teaching and learning process. Only three preservice teachers chose "strongly agree" as a response. Five selected "agree" and 3 selected "disagree." In contrast, none of the preservice teachers selected "disagree" when asked if students from middle income and wealthy households bring valuable out-of-school experiences and informal knowledge to the teaching and learning process. The seniors' responses are not in total congruence with Ladson-Billings (1995) definition of a culturally relevant teacher. The variations could be representative of the preservice teachers' interactions in high poverty urban communities prior to college and during field experiences. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), the idea of bringing valuable out-of-school experiences is equally as vital to the learning process as formal knowledge. If the preservice teachers are uncertain of the value of informal experiences of students living in high poverty urban

schools, what does that imply about the worth and importance of their student's home life, culture, and lived experiences?

Research (Cannata, 20110; deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999) has shown that teacher candidates may have a disconnect between their cognitive ability, ideals and willingness to teach in diverse settings. There is also the conception that teachers cling to prior knowledge and beliefs about others with tenacity, and it is often difficult for them to release preconceived notions regarding diversity and social class (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Wiggins, Follo, & Eberly, 2007). Studies by deMarrais & LeCompte (1999) confirmed that teachers favor children who share their personal values, despite the student's academic ability. Since many teachers, such as the preservice teachers selected for this study, were either born into or acquired cultural capital through their own educational advancement, and have the habits and aspirations of the middle class, many find it difficult to interact with students who do not share the same.

A study by Mabokela and Madsen (2003) concluded that cultural identity among teachers adds to the way they are socialized and embraced into an organization. While their study pertained to Black teachers in predominately White suburban schools, the same notions of difference were found with Black middle and upper class preservice teachers in high poverty urban schools. The same levels of unfamiliarity that existed in Mabokela and Madsen's research are congruent to the feelings expressed by the 11 preservice teachers in this study. Cultural identity acknowledges one's sense of self as a cultural being and having manners in which the culture is reflected within the norms and values of the group. Furthermore, a consequence of intergroup tensions includes being

pressured to act unnaturally and having a split identity at work and at home. Boundary heightening occurs when an individual from a different environment from the majority enters an organization. The heightened awareness of differences that exist between the majority and minority brings frustration, overreliance on stereotypes, and culture shock (Mabokela and Madsen, 2003). This occurrence seems to be the prevalent concern of the 11 preservice teachers who participated in this study.

The same boundary heightening that exists in research by Mabokela and Madsen (2003) was also conceptualized by Barth (1969) who analyzed how ethnic groups negotiated social boundaries amongst themselves. He found that identities are socially constructed through a group's interaction with each other and that group identity does not emerge from a group's isolation from other cultures, but from ongoing contact with other cultural groups. This phenomenon relates to this study as the Black middle and upper class preservice teachers negotiate their feelings towards teaching and learning in high poverty urban schools.

As reflected in the comments of the research participants, the boundaries framework though appropriate to this study, becomes muddied when race and class intersect. Race and class are highly complicated and personal constructs that need to be acknowledged. As referenced in this research, race and class have been inexorably linked in the United States for generations and the lack of dialogue surrounding these intersections leads to difficulty in locating a framework to discuss one without the other (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999; Soto 2008). Soto (2008) compared the intersection as "watching a bird fly without looking at the sky: it's possible, but it misses the larger context." Likewise, Cose (1993) shared a sentiment and resentment held by middle and

upper class Blacks that regardless of accomplishment or status, race can never be treated with irrelevancy. He shared an example provided during a conversation with David Dinkins, who at the time was the first Black mayor of New York, "A white man with a million dollars is a millionaire, and a black man with a million dollars is a nigger with a million dollars" (Cose, 1993, p.28).

Barth (1969) suggested that group identity emerges from a group's ongoing contact with other cultural groups and Lacy (2007) stated that middle class Blacks erect exclusionary boundaries around lower class Blacks by disassociating themselves from commonly held stereotypical Black behavior, emphasizing shared White experiences, and highlighting educational and professional credentials. The research participants conveyed varying degrees of boundary crossing in terms of their teaching preferences. After analyzing the data, there were only two research participants who aspired to cross a boundary from growing up in a middle or upper income community and desiring to teach in a high poverty urban school. Layla indicated a preference to teach in a high poverty urban school and Carrington did as well, but only if middle and upper class students also attended the school. For Renee, Kimberly, and Daphine, boundaries were perhaps less distinct. Each had attended a high poverty school during formal schooling and each expressed a desire to teach in a high poverty urban school. The other 6 participants, Catherine, Alyssa, Melanie, Destiny, Simone, and Bella attended middle and upper class schools and preferred to teach in the same setting. While the scope of the study did not include the specific reasons why the participants did not want to teach in high poverty urban schools, a few of their answers suggested they felt uneasy about connecting with students and parents.

Akkerman and Bakker (2011) discussed the terminology *boundary crossing* which symbolizes how professionals enter into work environments in which they are unfamiliar, often unqualified, and face the challenges of negotiating and combining components from different contexts to achieve hybrid situations. During the duration of the study, Catherine, Alyssa, and Melanie expressed a lack of desire to teach in a high poverty urban school, however each is currently teaching in a high poverty school (see postscript). It will be interesting to determine through future research, the connections, survival, and success of these three participants as they negotiate boundary crossing in a high poverty urban school against their stated preference.

Lacy (2007) proposed that middle class Blacks erect exclusionary boundaries around lower class Blacks by disassociating themselves from commonly held stereotypical Black behavior, emphasizing shared White experiences, and highlighting educational and professional credentials. It is not possible to ascertain whether such disassociation was evident in this study, as it was not specifically included in the background questionnaire, individual interview, or group interview. Although six participants indicated that they attended predominately White schools, they did not expand on a shared experience with their White classmates or discuss if commonly held stereotypical behavior in high poverty urban communities was a reason for wanting to teach in middle and upper class communities. Future research could lend itself to the specific reasons for choosing to teach in a middle and peer class schools opposed to one located in a high poverty urban community.

Recognition of Effective Teaching Strategies

The Social Relations component of Ladson-Billings' theory of culturally relevant pedagogy implies that culturally relevant teachers establish and maintain positive teacher-student relationships and classroom learning communities. They are also passionate about teaching and view it as service to the community (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In addition, the Conceptions of Knowledge construct suggests that culturally relevant teachers view knowledge as fluid and facilitate students' ability to construct their own understanding (Ladson-Billings, 1995). All of the preservice teachers were able to provide examples of effective teaching strategies to enhance student learning. It seems that the courses and field and student teaching experiences of the teacher education program have benefitted the senior early childhood education preservice teachers. As evidenced by their responses on the background questionnaire, individual and group interviews, they have a positive and strong foundation of pedagogy and process.

In addition, the preservice teachers were passionate about their future in education. All gave clear responses on the background questionnaire when asked why they wanted to enter the teaching profession. They were each able to easily articulate their passion and vision for their purpose for working with children.

Implications

The data demonstrated that the 11 preservice teachers have a strong pedagogical foundation, but lack confidence to teach in high poverty urban schools. If the teacher education program wants to continue its mission of preparing students for success in urban classrooms, it would be beneficial for it and other teacher education programs geared towards urban learners, to increase the level of teacher candidate engagement

outside of the walls of their college classrooms. Although teacher candidates participate in field experiences and clinical practice, an increase in community activism would be highly beneficial. In terms of teacher preparation across the county, candidates need more interaction with children outside of the schools to comprehend their complete childhood experience.

Mentoring, participation in community and school events, and active involvement in the life of the community might afford teacher candidates a different lens from which to view how social class affects schooling. Banks (1993) suggested there is a vast discrepancy between theory and practice in the field of multicultural education. In order for widespread change to occur, institutions must be willing to alter curricula, teaching resources, dispositions, goals, and perceptions of school administrators (Banks, 1993). Recently, the teacher education program has broadened the scope and diversity of its field experiences sites and increased the number of field experience hours for the preservice teachers. Furthermore, an active goal of the research site is to engage all students in global learning experiences to enhance their intercultural knowledge. It will be of interest to research how these program changes affect the perceptions of current students towards teaching and learning in high poverty urban schools.

A second implication that results from this study is to give Black middle and upper class preservice teachers a place “at the research table” and recognition as a significant subgroup of Black society. Research has confirmed that the majority of teachers are females, have been reared in predominately White middle class communities across the United States, and may be less aware of the social injustices and education inequities that may confront them as teachers and become a barrier to reaching all

learners in their future classrooms (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 1999; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Vaughan, 2005). Limited research has been conducted on Black middle and upper class teacher candidates who may share similar characteristics as White middle class teachers based upon their experiences prior to attending college. Regardless of skin color, some middle class teachers do not understand why children from poor backgrounds perform the way they do at school (Jensen, 2009; Kunjufu 2002).

Data from this research study has demonstrated that Black senior early childhood education preservice teachers who were raised in middle or upper class communities and had little or no exposure to high poverty urban communities were apprehensive about teaching in a high poverty neighborhood. Carrington, Catherine, and Bella who were raised in middle or upper class communities and schools, explicitly stated their reservations about teaching in a high poverty urban community. This view relates to Barth's (1969) analysis of how ethnic groups negotiate social boundaries by establishing and protecting boundaries between themselves and outsiders. Similarly, Lacy (2007) proposed that middle class Blacks put up exclusionary boundaries around lower class Blacks by disassociating themselves from commonly held stereotypical Black behavior, emphasizing shared White experiences, and highlighting educational and professional credentials.

These phenomena, although among only 11 participants, show there is the need for future research studies that closely examine the perceptions of Black middle and upper class teacher candidates, especially as they are correlated with their own childhoods.

Limitations

The primary limitation to this study was my relationship to the participants, which can also be viewed as a strength of the study. As their former instructor, the participants were aware of my teaching and personal background, passion for urban education, and high expectations of them. Given this knowledge, the participants' answers could have reflected what they believe I wanted to hear. Instead, the participants' views did not always reflect my beliefs and they shared their reservations throughout the study. In a few instances, Carrington asked if I wanted her to be honest. I believe this was her attempt to shield me from her honesty on teaching and learning in high poverty urban schools. Although previous involvement with my students could be seen as a limitation, Du Bois (1944) stated that social science research must begin with the near and known as a starting point. Researchers can no longer find scientific refuge in detachment from their subject matter. I have acknowledged my subjectivity, utilized consistent methodological approaches backed by sound data, and maintained a balance between both the participants' and my voice.

A second limitation to this study was the selectivity of the research site. Due to its small private school setting, the research participant pool was small and controlled in comparison to a larger public university.

Postscript

As a faculty member of the teacher education program, I was able to learn from each participant about her post graduation plans. The current teaching experiences of the 11 participants are as diverse as their personalities and experiences. Layla is teaching 5th grade in a high poverty urban school located in Florida. Alyssa is teaching kindergarten

at a Washington, DC high poverty urban charter school and attends graduate school majoring in global education. Bella is teaching English in China through an international teaching program. Renee is working as a certified reading tutor at an elementary school located in a high poverty urban community in Georgia. Melanie is teaching high school mathematics in a Florida high poverty urban school. Daphine is teaching elementary school in a California urban middle or upper class community. Kimberly is enrolled in a graduate school program in the Caribbean. Simone is still seeking a teaching position. Two of the students, Carrington and Catherine were accepted into Teach for America. Although they each recognize that they matriculated through an approved four year teacher education program, they were drawn by the financial incentive for graduate school and job security in light of the scarcity of teacher positions within the city where the college is located. Carrington teaches in a high poverty urban school in Texas and Catherine teaches elementary school in an international school in Georgia. Destiny accepted a nanny position for an affluent family in Georgia.

After reflecting on the teaching assignments and work choices of the research participants, I came to two conclusions. My initial reflection was that school system staffing demands and job availability led to the difference between preferred teaching assignments and actual teaching positions. Realizing the nation's present economic status, any recent college graduate is fortunate to locate employment. Although Melanie and Alyssa did not desire to work in a high poverty urban school, both are currently working in low income communities. In addition to working in a high poverty urban school, Melanie is teaching high school math, which is not in her certification area. Carrington, who indicated a desire to teach in a diverse school with both high poverty and

middle or upper class students, is working in a high poverty urban school. Catherine is teaching in an international school where half of the student body are recent immigrants and refugees. Since Carrington and Catherine are members of Teach For America, their job placement choices were probably decided by the organization. Daphine, who desired to work in a high poverty urban school, is teaching in a middle or upper class elementary school.

My second thought was that Carrington, Catherine, Melanie, and Alyssa experienced growth during student teaching and participation in this research project. After having success in a high poverty urban school, maybe each decided to work in a similar school after graduation. Future research and follow-up with all the participants will shed light on their teaching assignments, realization of perceptions, job satisfaction, and ability to connect with students and parents in high poverty urban schools.

Future Research

As I reflected on this research study, I found there to be many opportunities for expansion. It would be interesting to follow these 11 recent college graduates into their first years of teaching to witness their growth and changes or lack thereof regarding their perceptions of teaching and learning in high poverty urban schools. Although they may have had a plan of where they desired to teach, staffing demands in schools districts may have altered their realities. As evidenced by the current teaching positions of the 11 preservice teachers, especially with five (Carrington, Layla, Renee, Melanie and Alyssa) teaching in high poverty urban schools, a subsequent study to follow their journeys would be beneficial to this body of knowledge. Another future research area could be to explore the stages of racial identity of Black middle and upper class teacher candidates and how it

is correlated to their views of teaching and learning in high poverty urban schools. It would also be useful to expand this study to include Black middle and upper class teacher candidates at other historically Black colleges and universities, as well as predominantly White institutions and note how they are similar and different. A final area of further research would be to examine the student and parent perceptions of Black middle and upper class teachers. This feedback would allow for open dialogue and add to the field of knowledge pertaining to Black middle and upper class teacher candidates and how they effectively cross boundaries and make change within high poverty urban schools across the nation.

Future research could be conducted with the same questionnaires and interview protocols. In particular, the group interview provides an opportunity for the researcher to witness and hear the reactions of each participant when listening to or responding to another participant.

Conclusions

In completing this study, I felt some tension between the written conceptual framework of the teacher education program at this college in comparison to the students' personal viewpoints and trajectories. The conceptual framework states, "We envision the teacher education program at the forefront in preparing competent, self-confident leaders who are committed to educating children in urban multicultural and international communities." The research participants, with the exception of Renee, Kimberly and Daphine, who grew up in high poverty communities and Layla who acknowledged a God-given gift for teaching, do not seem to have a burning desire to test their skills and success levels in teaching in high poverty urban schools. While the students may not

have met the goals of the college's conceptual framework, I do not think it is fair to say they will fail the teaching profession. As a college instructor, I tell my students frequently that it is important for them to find their niche or purpose in the teaching profession. Just as each child is different, each teacher has her own strengths and weaknesses. It is just as important for effective teachers to know their limitations as well as their strengths. Hilliard stated in a Kentucky Educational Television teacher workshop (2001),

> The critical lesson to learn is that the power is in the teacher to make a difference in students' lives. No special equipment, reform, or technology is needed. The good news is that the solutions to the problem have been found. The only questions left are how will this information be disseminated and do we have the will to implement the solutions? There are four things teachers can do to be successful with all students: set high goals, be problem-solvers and collaborate to figure out strategies, use feedback daily to plan instruction, and acquire deep content knowledge. (p. 1)

In another publication, Hilliard (1991) discussed the critical component to success in the classroom:

> This risk to our children in school is not a risk associated with their intelligence. Our failures have nothing to do with IQ, nothing to do with poverty, nothing to do with race, nothing to do with language, nothing to do with styles, nothing to do with the need to discovering new pedagogy, nothing to do with discovering new and differentiated pedagogies, nothing to do with the children's families. All of these are red herrings. The study of them may ultimately lead to some greater insight into the instructional process; but at present they serve to distract attention from the fundamental problem facing us today: *Do we truly will to see each and every child in this nation develop to the peak of his or her capacities?* (p. 36)

The participants in this study have expressed a desire for every child to learn and succeed. In their own unique way, each participant possesses the intrinsic will for her students to achieve success. While I do not think the teacher candidates have failed the purposes of their matriculation through the teacher education program, the college, and

other similar teacher education programs, may need to revisit the wording and design of their conceptual framework as it relates to preparing students to become effective teachers in urban classrooms. Based on the current wording, if the program graduates do not aspire to teach in urban classrooms, does that mean the teacher education program has failed its mission? Or, is it an indication that the teacher education program is preparing effective teachers to make a difference in diverse classrooms across the country? I believe this is an assessment that the teacher education program, and teacher education programs across the country with similar student populations, will have to make of its program and students.

The teacher beliefs summarized by Winfield (1986) explain the relationship between teachers and students, and the construction of teacher roles. Teachers, who play a pivotal role in nurturing and educating youth, are often the crucial link in advancing children from poor communities (Cuthrell, Stapleton, & Ledford, 2010; Haberman, 1995; Rist, 2009). Teacher quality, longevity, and intentions can make or break a child's zeal to learn. A teacher's expectation of a student's academic performance has a strong influence on the student's actual performance. The most important aspects of teaching according to Hilliard (1991) seem to already be in practice by the majority of the research participants. Hilliard (1991) suggested the primary roles of teachers, which are often in contrast to the view of teachers as technicians:

> 1. The teacher as a member of an intellectual learning community, both general and specialized; 2. The teacher as stakeholder in the community that he or she serves; 3. The teacher as community advocate and not merely as student advocate; 4. The teacher as participant in goal setting for children and their communities (p. 36)

Whether or not the participants complete their teaching careers in high poverty urban schools, a contrasting community, or one in between, the critical component is that they

do what is right for the children they serve. Given the need for more excellent teachers in high poverty urban schools, the findings of this study challenge teacher preparation programs to incorporate more effective boundary crossing experiences for middle and upper class preservice teachers.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Data Collection Timeline

	January 2011	February 2011	March 2011
Questionnaires			
Individual Interviews			
Group Interview			
Member Checks			

APPENDIX B

Background Questionnaire

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. The information you provide will be stored in a locked office and password protected computer. Your name and other facts that might point to your identity will not appear in the presentation this study or published results.

Background Information

1. Name:

2. Age:

3. Hometown (city and state):

4. Education level and profession of your mother:

5. Education level and professions of your father:
6. Parental Income: Check the appropriate category
   - ☐ Under $29,999/year
   - ☐ Between 30,000-49,999/year
   - ☐ Between $50,000-$99,999/year
   - ☐ Over $100,000/year

Questions:

7. Why do you want to enter the teaching profession?

8. Describe the K-12 schools you attended. Where were they located? What type of community did the majority of the students reside?

Elementary	Middle	High
☐ Suburban	☐ Suburban	☐ Suburban
☐ Rural	☐ Rural	☐ Rural
☐ Urban	☐ Urban	☐ Urban
☐ Majority Black	☐ Majority Black	☐ Majority Black
☐ Majority White	☐ Majority White	☐ Majority White
☐ Diverse	☐ Diverse	☐ Diverse
☐ Middle or upper income	☐ Middle or upper income	☐ Middle or upper income
☐ High poverty	☐ High poverty	☐ High poverty

9. Was there something unique about your schools or your presence within the schools? If so, please explain.

10. Describe the K-5 school you would like to teach in when you graduate from college. Where is it located? What type of community do your students reside?

- ☐ Suburban
- ☐ Rural
- ☐ Urban

- ☐ Majority Black
- ☐ Majority White
- ☐ Diverse

- ☐ Middle or upper income
- ☐ High Poverty

11. What schools have you visited for field experience requirements in the Teacher education program?

12. Do you believe you can be successful teacher in a high poverty urban school?

13. At what point did you become cognizant of the role of socioeconomic status in children's schooling experiences.

14. Students living in poverty are capable of attaining the same level of academic achievement as students from middle income or wealthy households.
    _____ Strongly Agree _____ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Strongly Disagree

15. My cultural background and lived experiences shape how I view myself, others, and impact who I am as a teacher.
    _____ Strongly Agree _____ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Strongly Disagree

16. Students from middle income or wealthy households bring valuable out-of-school experiences and informal knowledge to the teaching and learning process.
    _____ Strongly Agree _____ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Strongly Disagree

17. Students living in poverty bring valuable out-of-school experiences and informal knowledge to the teaching and learning process.
    _____ Strongly Agree _____ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Strongly Disagree

18. A good teacher exhibits a warm, caring, and positive disposition regardless of a student's race, class, gender, religion, language, culture, sexual orientation, and all other characteristics.
    _____ Strongly Agree _____ Agree _____ Disagree _____ Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX C

Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your childhood.
2. What types of extracurricular activities or organizations were you involved it?
3. Were you afforded opportunities because of your parent's income?
4. a. At any point in your childhood did you have the experience of living in a high poverty neighborhood?
   b. What experiences have you had working in a high poverty neighborhood?
   c. Did you visit relatives or attend church in a high poverty neighborhood?
   d. Have you participated in a community service project in a high poverty neighborhood?
5. If you answered yes to number 4, how did you feel after your experiences in the high poverty neighborhood?
6. Share a belief about teaching and learning in high poverty schools.
7. What does the term at-risk mean to you?
8. What might schools with at-risk students do to meet their needs?
9. Some people believe that Black middle and upper class preservice teachers are prepared to teach in high poverty urban schools because they most likely share the same skin color as their students. Do you agree or disagree and why?
10. Do you have the intrinsic will to educate all children regardless of their economic status? How do you know?
11. Some educators suggest that low income students learn better in an environment that is teacher-centered, emphasizes direct instruction, and seatwork. Do you agree or disagree with this position? Explain.
12. Some educators also suggest that low income and minority students do not bring valuable out-of-school experiences and informal knowledge to the teaching and learning process. Do you agree or disagree with this position? Explain.

APPENDIX D

Group Interview

Discussion prompt:

Ladson-Billings (2009) offered concrete examples and authentic statistics on the plight of Black urban children in today's schools. Black children continue to perform lower academically compared to White peers, are three times more likely to drop out of school, and two times more likely to be suspended. Although Black students comprise 17 percent of the total school population, they make up 41 percent of the special education population. Additionally, one of every two Black children resides in poverty. A Black child is five times more likely to depend on public assistance, and if living in California is three times more likely to be murdered than admitted to the University of California (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Similarly, Lomotey (1992) cited teacher attitudes as a contributing factor to the failing academic achievement of a large number of Black children as evidenced by standardized achievement tests, suspension rates, special education placement, and dropout rates.

1. Do you think you will be able to connect with students in a high poverty urban school?
2. What strategies would you use to connect with students in a high poverty urban school?
3. Do you think you will be able to connect to the parents of your students in a high poverty urban school?
4. What strategies would you use to connect to the parents of your students in a high poverty urban school?

Appendix E

Coding Manual

Theme	Codes	Quotations
Preservice teachers prefer to teach in communities similar to their own school experiences	Similarity of education background and teacher preference o No experiences in high poverty school/communities, want to teach in middle or upper class school o Experience in high poverty schools/communities, want to teach in high poverty school o Negative case, does not meet either criteria	See Table 2 *Preservice Teachers' Personal School Experiences and Their Preferred Teaching Experiences* *Code: No experiences in high poverty schools/communities, want to teach in middle or upper class school* "I chose these groups because these are the things I am familiar with and what I know how to work with." - Bella (Background Q10) "Honestly, I feel the only way I can be successful is if I had total determination and access to many resources. So I guess you would say I am uncertain." On the background survey, Bella noted that she wants to teach in an urban elementary school with middle or upper income students." – Bella (Individual Q10) "Originally I wanted to teach students who went to school in circumstances like I was in because I never really had a role model who was African-American, at least not in school. But then someone said to me why would you focus just on one student when you could do the same thing for twenty students." – Catherine (Individual Q10) "I don't know, because I grew up in …, but I lived in a neighborhood with all houses, all the houses were

		kept up. And, from kindergarten throughout my whole elementary school it was, it was mixed. And then when it got to middle school that's when it stopped being mixed, so I don't really know if it was poverty or not. I want to teach in an elementary school located in a suburban community with students of diverse racial groups, and in a middle or upper income household." – Simone (Individual Q10) *Code: Experience in high poverty schools/communities, want to teach in high poverty school* "If I had to I would teach in…a school setting where the students were upper class, but I would prefer to definitely be in a high poverty or middle class situation. They may not have at-home opportunities, but I feel like if you bring it to the classroom and expose it to them, they'll still be able to have the same academic achievement level that students whose parents can take them out to the various, I guess cultural capital places, you would go to." - Daphine (Individual Q10) "Most definitely. I have a passion for the urban setting school but, I mean I'm willing to teach everywhere and, and all races, whoever, but I really want to teach you know the students that I feel like I can make, I can really, really help and really, really need my help. You decided to take on teaching especially in the area you decide to teach in," and she is confident that she will make a difference." – Kimberly

		(Individual Q10) "I think that one of my biggest beliefs is that in high poverty neighborhoods and schools teachers have to be the biggest advocates for children. I believe that because most parents are working if not one, two jobs and they're working really late. And they may not have the time to give all of the support that the children need so they need to be able to get it from school. And then also we, high poverty schools might not have the resources that other schools may have, so it just goes to show that teachers really need to be on the ball and pushing the students and letting them know that they can do it no matter what life throws at them." – Renee (Individual Q10) "I know I can form lasting and impacting relationships that can have an effect on their education. As long as I put forth the effort and believe, my students will do well." – Layla (Individual Q10) "I guess one of the reasons why I want to be a teacher, because it's sad but at the same time it's like, what can I do to help? I think that the best way to reach the situation is to start with the younger generation. The reason why I want to work with elementary school children is I feel like I can catch them earlier in life. It won't leave; maybe it will break the generational poverty. Give them something to look forward, give them experience outside of the

		neighborhood. So I mean it's really sad because it's mostly when you think about poverty you really think about African Americans which is really sad because I'm an African American. And I can imagine what other races think when they think about poverty, so I feel like I mean as an African American and as an educator I feel like it's my duty to help, help, help my children. Help the kids that look like me." – Kimberly (Individual Q4a) "The top three things to bring to the classroom are care, love and hope. I think that if you bring hope to a child's life, then the sky is the limit. And I really, really do believe that." – Kimberly (Individual Q6) *Code: Negative case, does not meet either criteria* There is not a quote correlated with this code. Carrington noted on background Q10 that she wanted to work in a high poverty school with middle and upper income students.
The majority of Black middle and upper class preservice teachers believe students from high poverty urban schools can achieve at the same level as students in middle and upper class schools, but are uncertain of the value their informal knowledge brings to the classroom	Achievement and Value of Experiences ○ High poverty students capable of academic achievement ○ High poverty students not capable of academic achievement ○ High poverty students have valuable out-of-school experiences and informal knowledge	See Table 3 *Perceptions of Preservice Teachers* *Code: High poverty students have valuable out-of-school experiences and informal knowledge* "I believe that they do bring knowledge. It just may be a different type of knowledge. I've seen students where maybe I would relate a visit going to the zoo with talking about something. They may not relate it going to the zoo. They may say, you know, I've seen the dog catcher come run and catch

	○ High poverty students do not have valuable out-of-school experiences and informal knowledge	the dogs and it may be a different type of experience but it's still relative to the learning so I disagree. I believe that every student has their own experiences that they can bring to the table. It may just not be what society deems a good experience." – Carrington (Individual Q12)
Recognition of effective teaching strategies and best practices	Recognition of best practices and strategies ○ Range of instructional strategies ○ Culturally relevant pedagogy ○ Belief that all children can learn	*Code: Range of instructional strategies* "I don't believe in students walking down the hallway with their hands behind their back or sitting at their seat doing work all day long. I feel that they need to get up and interact with each other. It's part of learning and it's a part of life." - Carrington (Individual Q11) "I think a combination of those things or at least direct instruction with more hands on interactive work is better for our students in lower income situations." – Catherine (Individual Q11) "I disagree with that statement because I feel like that's a cop-out because these children are coming from high poverty areas, I feel like sometimes people think that they automatically have behavior issues so, we don't want them to move around the class too much because so and so may get into it with so and so. I feel like you have to bring hope to classrooms, and that's why I said hope before because if I'm going into the classroom with this mindset, then my students are going to feed off of that and they're going to give me back what I give them. So why would I have them sit, I don't want

		to listen to someone sit down and talk to me from 8:00 to 2:30. I want them to move around, I want the students to be, they're still children, they're in elementary school so you, this is not a college setting." Kimberly (Individual Q11) "I think some educators say that because they don't know how to necessarily deal with the behaviors of low-income students. The behaviors that they pick up from home and bring into school, so they want to have them sit in their desk all day. I think that learning for these students need to be, needs to be interactive because they might not be being exposed to certain things outside of a classroom. So that's our opportunity as educators to expose them to as much as possible. And doing seatwork and direct instruction and having a teacher centered classroom is not the way to go about that." – Renee (Individual Q11) *Code: Students recognize culturally relevant pedagogy* "I think first the teacher needs to get to know her students and know what works best for them and then use that to structure the way, how her lessons and her classroom is run." - Layla, Individual (Individual Q11) "A really good strategy would be to read up on a lot of the teachers who have come from neighborhoods other than these schools and hear their success stories. I read a book about a teacher in California who

		didn't know what he was dealing with and yet he created his own reading program and now all of the students in that school and in that neighborhood want to come to his class." – Renee (Group Q2) "By seeing and experiencing the community that your students come from, you can see what type of backgrounds they are coming from, see the type of needs that they have in their neighborhoods, and you can try to understand or comprehend the differences that you will see between yourself and the students. I was just speaking to a couple teachers about students not having backpacks. They don't even have paper. So when they come to school and they are angry and they don't seem like they want to be there, as opposed to when I came to school and I was happy and excited to come to school, it can help you see why some of those differences may arise." – Carrington (Group Q2) "I think a lot of the same strategies apply regardless of if it's a high poverty area or a high income area. You have to spend time and go out of your way to make time to get to know your students. So if that means taking a few days when they first start in the school year to figure out what they are interested in, what gets them excited. And then using those things, that information that they tell you throughout the school year to get them involved." – Catherine (Group Q2)

		"more willing to talk to you about different needs or different things that are going on that may affect the student's learning inside and outside the classroom- Daphine (Group Q4) "I would try to get to know them on a personal level as well, I would also make sure to talk to them in a language that is not threatening, and does not make them feel as if they are being talked down to. I would also ask them for suggestions on what they would like me to do to help their children learn so that they feel as if they are a part of their child's learning process." - Simone (Group Q4) *Code: Students recognize belief that all children can learn* "I honestly believe that everybody can learn like regardless of their, you know, socio-economic status or whatever is going on at home. One belief that I have adopted from different schools that I have gotten to visit and interview with is called "there's no excuses." And it's just that it pushes the idea that no matter what's going on, like you as an individual, you can still learn. So, you know all the things that are going on at home, yes, they may factor how you learn, but they don't prevent you from learning." – Alyssa (Individual Q6)

Black middle and upper class preservice teachers have mixed feelings regarding their ability to connect with students and parents in high poverty urban schools	Ability to connect with students and parents o Common skin color = yes connection (Tally: 0) o Common skin color = no connection (Tally: 7) o Common skin color = two perspectives (Tally: 4) o Socioeconomic status and age	*Code: Common skin color = no connection* "If you haven't been exposed to what the children are exposed to in high poverty neighborhoods you're not going to understand where they're coming from. Just having the same skin color as someone doesn't make you connected with them at all. And I feel like if you've never been in a high poverty neighborhood, never volunteered there, never worked there, then you're not, you're most likely not going to understand your students. And not have the right resources to help them get to where they need to be." – Renee (Individual Q9) "Skin color doesn't make you, doesn't allow you to be relatable to someone else. To a certain extent it does, but that's not the whole spectrum. I think that in order to be relatable to a student regardless if they're Black or whatever skin color they are, you need to put yourself in their shoes and try to imagine what they're experiencing and kind of humble yourself so that you can meet them where they are and get them to the next level."- Destiny (Individual Q9)

		"No. I know that there's a teacher that is in fourth grade and she is White and she is probably from the same type of neighborhood that I am from. I have spoken to her about her past and I think that we both can bring the same educational resources, educational ideas to the team, to the table. Some of the slang that I don't understand she doesn't understand either. It's not the way that I grew up. It's not the way that she grew up. But we're both here as teachers, not as friends, not as someone to relate to from outside of school. We're just both here to teach. So I don't think that that has anything to do with it." - Carrington (Individual Q9) "Socioeconomic status can change behavior and attitudes very much so and being both…having…being black and then teaching people who are black who might be from a different socioeconomic status is…they're two different worlds. "- Catherine (Individual Q9) "I would have to say I don't agree just because you are the same skin color as someone does not mean that you go through the same things as a whole. I feel like your exposure to both sides of the spectrum will enable you to be able to teach students who are in high poverty areas. But just to say that you all are the same skin color will afford you to teach them and be effective is not true." - Layla (Individual Q9)

		“Well I don’t think it's at every school, because I know some people at [name of college/university] which is a majority White institution and they don’t do as much as we do as far as it concerns low economic status students or Black students.“ – Simone (Individual Q9) *Code: Common skin color = two perspectives* “I think it's just based on the experience of the person. Some people, coming from middle class families and situations may not be able to handle high poverty situations because it may not be something that they are used to, or they can relate to. “ - Kimberly (Individual Q9) “For the most part I agree because I know firsthand when I’ve had Black teachers I’m more likely to connect with them. But then at the same time I feel just because your skin color is the same doesn’t mean you have shared the same experiences. So it’s not always like a one hundred percent kind of thing. But I think for the most part it does have an impact.” - Alyssa (Individual Q9) “Oh, I definitely feel like they may have that one connection, we’re both African American so they can talk about I guess the African American cultural aspect. But at the same time I feel like you never know like what a child has to go through unless you were in that same position. Like even myself I thought you know, I may be able to

		connect with students because I grew up in the same type of area as them. But my student teaching has shown me that it's things that these kids have to deal with that you can never be on their level. I feel like the fact that I'm in college puts me at a different point in, like a point or different view from what a lot of these students deal with. So I feel like instead of saying I'm the same level as them, it's like I can tell them, like I was where you were and this is what I did to you know, better my situation. Or to give them the tools that they need to better their situations. I wouldn't say that I was on the same level as them because I just feel they deal with different things and deal with things that I didn't have to deal with just because I was afforded different opportunities than them. But I can see how people could get, draw that conclusion." - Daphine (Individual Q9) "I agree because from my experience the people who I know in education now have been Black middle and higher income. And they love working with urban and, you know, at risk children or in high poverty areas, just because they can give back. They see what these children don't have that they did have. I also disagree because not everybody can teach, so not everybody has that teaching quality to be an effective teacher especially working with students at risk." - Bella (Individual Q9) "I don't know. A little of both. I feel like as an African-American I

		feel like I could give back to my community. I could show my kids that I, too, came from a low income area but I graduated, well I will be graduating from college and you can do it too. So it's not, I guess it's nice for kids to see someone that looks like them and they've been successful and maybe they will be encouraged and want to do the same. " - Melanie (Individual Q9) *Code: Socioeconomic and age connections* "don't have to just be made off of socioeconomic background decisions or choices, or even outcomes that you've had in your life. They can be based off of things that you may have in common, things that you like, things that you are interested in." Carrington, (Group Q1) "I would just like to say that that's one of my biggest issues is that I feel like because parents look at me and they hear that my voice doesn't sound like theirs or I may not dress like them that I automatically think that I'm above them, that I know more about their child. And it really hurts sometimes because it's kind of like, "I'm coming to you for help. I need your help. We have to do this together. We have to work together. We have to form a connection so that we can help your child move further." And they just want to stop it at the ground. And I haven't had it happen very much at my student teaching. Mainly mostly because they don't…they know that I'm not the main teacher.

		But I'm really worried about it next year because the looks that I get from parents in the school, the sideways glances, all that type of stuff has already happened. And I'm really worried about being able to make a connection. To know that I can talk to parents about what's happening in the classroom."- Carrington (Group Q3) "I can say that it's something I worry about as well because I've had parents come to me and say, "You just look so young, like, I can't believe you're teaching." Even though they're not much older than I am half the time. But, so I think it's kind of hard because sometimes they still look at me as a child when technically I would be the teacher in the situation. So I'm not saying I won't be able to connect. It would definitely just be a challenge." – Bella (Group Q3) "As nervous as I am about connecting with parents and them not understanding where I'm coming from or seeing me as an actual point of authority, I think I have learned a lot from my student teaching teacher who calls parents throughout the day." - Catherine (Group Q3) "students are students and children are children." – Kimberly (Group Q1) "The area in which a school is located does not determine one's ability to connect. In order to form a genuine relationship, you must

		show that you care and you must prove yourself trustworthy. There should not be any difference in one's ability to connect with students who attend schools in high poverty areas and with students who attend schools in affluent suburban areas." – Layla (Group Q1) "I think while sharing similar backgrounds with students helps, it's not the determining factor in one's ability to connect with them. I'm great at building relationships with people and I think once you students realize you care about them, they are more willing to connect with them."- Alyssa (Group Q1) "Even though we have a common interest, which is their child, it's hard to connect with them when they don't make the initiative to come meet me or if I call they don't answer the phone, you know what I mean? So how am I supposed to connect with someone if I don't ever see them?" – Melanie Group Interview, Question #3 "At first I was going say I don't think that it's necessary that I would connect with them, but that I would know how to deal with them. But that's not true. As I think about it, I feel like I would be able to connect with my student's parents because I've seen where they are and I understand where they're coming from. And once I communicate that to them and, you know, "I understand that you work two jobs. And I understand that

		you may be doing this, you may be doing that." You know, I've since seen that and I've been there before. I feel like it would open up a door for them to be, like, "Okay, well, she's not judging me. So let me try to do what I can to help my student…to help my child." – Renee (Group Q3) "I think that I will be able to connect with the parents. It is a serious situation but I feel like there's already a connection and the common denominator is the student. You have their best interest at heart. And hopefully the parent has the child's best interest at heart. So with that being said, before a word's even spoken you can have your misconceptions before we talk but when we talk I need you to know that I'm here for your child. I'm not here for you, whether you like me or not, that's fine. But at the end of the day I'm gonna give you respect. That's all I need from you." – Kimberly (Group Q3) "Parents will understand that I am there for not only their child, but for them as well. One's duty of teaching goes beyond the classroom in order to get the most significant and impactful results." – Alyssa (Group Q3)

Preparation from the teacher education program positively impacted the preservice teachers' view of high poverty urban schools	Program preparation ○ Students became advocates through coursework, activities, field experiences, and student teaching ○ Preparation provides connection	*Code: Students became advocates through coursework, activities, field experiences, and student teaching* "Going through the teacher education program, we are taught to have an urban education lens, so I've been very prepared through the program to do so." – Daphine (Group Q1) *Code: Preparation provides connection* "I think that I'll be able to connect with students in a high poverty urban school setting because we've been prepared throughout our matriculation. Students are students regardless of their socioeconomic status. You can find some way to connect with them." – Destiny (Group Q1) "Coming from this program, we're taught to work with children in high poverty neighborhoods. And I think that we'll be able to connect with them just fine." - Kimberly (Group Q1)

Appendix F

Coding Tree

This figure illustrates the Level I codes and their respective Level II codes that emerged from the background questionnaire, individual interview, and group interview.

Level One Codes	**Level Two Codes**
Similarity of education background and teacher preference	No experiences in high poverty school/communities, want to teach in middle or upper class school Experience in high poverty schools/communities, want to teach in high poverty school Negative case, does not meet either criteria
Achievement and Value of Experiences	High poverty students capable of academic achievement High poverty students not capable of academic achievement High poverty students have valuable out-of-school experiences and informal knowledge High poverty students do not have valuable out-of-school experiences and informal knowledge

Level One Codes	Level Two Codes
Recognition of best practices and strategies	Range of instructional strategies Culturally relevant pedagogy Belief that all children can learn
Ability to connect with students and parents	Common skin color = yes connection Common skin color = no connection Common skin color = two perspectives Socioeconomic status and age
Program Preparation	Students became advocates through coursework, activities, field experiences, and student teaching Preparation provides connection